









## Much glamour and much tin

Roy Foster

RICHARD DAVIS

The English Rothschilds  
274pp. Collins. £12.95.  
0 00 216212 1

At the centre of this study lies the Rothschild conundrum, still unsolved: why did the name conjure up power, glamour and secrecy to a degree rivalled only by the Society of Jesus in its palmy days, whereas its actual bearers cultivated a directly contrary image — brash, horsey and down to earth? This was largely dictated by the necessities of assimilation into high society. "Ride like trumps and do not let the Queen's people fancy we are all tailors", Nathaniel urges his brothers in 1840, neatly anticipating Sidonia's horse-race in *Contingency*. The family style became stamped to a remarkable degree by English diffidence. They invariably referred to their Croesus-like fortune, for instance, with an engaging casualness, as "tin". The favours to reigning sovereigns, the private courier service which outpaced that of any government, the international free-money of capital between brothers, and cousins in London, Paris and Frankfurt — all this was deliberately played down in favour of stag-hunting, the accumulation of broad acres, and university performances that were unerring gentleman-like in their mediocrity. The Rothschild style carefully ran counter to the brilliant and slightly sinister cosmopolitanism associated with the name.

Yet the judgment of John Vincent and A. B. Cooke on the high politics of 1885-6 still stands as an epitaph for any treatment of finance and politics in the nineteenth century: "somewhere in the background the Rothschild interest was closely involved, whether at a spiritual level only none can say". The same mastery blend of caution and candour characterises the book, which is employed by the fabulous family in their operation on the fringe of decision-making. The difficulty lies in

deciding where the line came between politics and profits, whether the priorities of these two preoccupations ever clashed, and what happened if they did.

Richard Davis addresses himself to this question, among others; but by and large he eschews speculation on the Rothschilds' political dealings in favour of emphasis on their position as honest brokers. Authorities who have stressed the other angle, from J. A. Hobson to Alfred Gollin, are taken to task for biased conclusions based on flimsy evidence. Professor Davis has tracked his heroes through several major political archives as well as the Rothschild collections in London and Manchester; they emerge more or less untainted by political impropriety in terms of financial interference, at least by the standards of their day. Intervention in Egypt, annexation of Burma, repudiation of Gladstone, war in South Africa, resistance in Ulster: in none of these crises does the family's involvement appear to have been a moving cause. And yet, despite Professor Davis's assurance, the allegations will no doubt continue to be made.

The persistence of the Rothschilds' reputation as an exotic secret society was, in fact, the achievement of Disraeli — not so much in his use of the bank to land the Suez Canal shares as in his determinedly colourful portrayal of the family in his fiction. To anyone who actually knew Baron Lionel, the idea that he resembled Sidonia was hilarious; but the legend lasted. The Neuchâtel family are nearer the mark, but are again closer to Jews than to Rothschilds. The family themselves found the younger Disraeli's "strange Talmudic strain" faintly embarrassing; their idea of Jewish emancipation was firmly placed in the context of liberalizing legal precedents, not the chimera of mystic destiny. By the 1860s the relationship was closer, as Davis shows; Disraeli would and his friends would not. Disraeli was the extended tribal circle. But by then his determined romanticization of the family had set them immovably into his

Arabian Nights fantasies of high Victorian political romance.

It is doubtful if the honour conferred was to the Rothschild taste; for much of Davis's story shows their experience running much closer to a Jewish family chronicle in the manner of Maisie Moscovitz. Powerful mothers, indulgent fathers and internecine enmities dominate the saga, played out against opulent settings, all Paxton glass and bouquet of flowers. There might be more about food; Rothschild feasts dazzled young gentry aristocrats, much as the Putnam fruit obsesses the hero of Philip Roth's *Goodbye Columbus*. Religious scruples were overcome to allow the keeping of pigs on Rothschild farms — not for eating, but for sniffing out truffles. Much of the family gossip is relayed to posterity in the diaries of Louise, wife of Sir Anthony Rothschild; in these pages she comes across as a Mrs Pooter at the feast. ("Charlotte Lionel was much admired by all the guests and she certainly looked strikingly handsome; I went home early, tired, nervous and out of sorts.")

The two dominant themes are those of every family saga. One is the establishment of property; family fiefs were staked out in Piccadilly and, even more spectacularly, the Vale of Aylesbury. Professor Davis has published a specialist study of Buckinghamshire, and he deals absorbingly with this aspect of the tale, though he gives rather cursory treatment to the awe-inspiring Rothschild mansions themselves. While awarding Mentmore its considerable due, he likes Ascot best, and Hailton and Waddesdon receive short shrift; there are hardly any pictures. Mayer becomes a respected High Sheriff of his county, and political influence inevitably follows the acquisition of property — a process contemporary as "the circumlocution of the Liberal Party". Aylesbury, Lionel's sons go up to Cambridge, sensibly concentrating on science rather than intellectual life. And this process indirectly leads to the second theme of

the saga: controversies over marriage. The Rothschilds married each other as strictly as any Persian royal family; Natty's marriage (a love match) to the daughter of his father's sister and his mother's brother simply fitted the general pattern. "Marrying out", for a Rothschild, meant marrying out of the family, not marrying out of Jewry. But the brothers' social success was followed by a series of alliances between their sisters and aristocratic young Christians, culminating in the great marriage between Mayer's daughter Hannah and Lord Rosebery. This threatened the Jewish family in the widest sense: "if the levitation is brought up by the hook", enquired the *Jewish Chronicle*, "how will the minnows escape?" And, with Rosebery's advance to the premiership, and particularly his role in Liberal Imperialism, it also brought into high profile that vexed connection between political power and financial influence.

On the evidence presented, Richard Davis is clearly correct in asserting that the Rothschilds were never a dominating influence in the formation of policy in the events leading to the Boer War, for instance, their advice was all on the side of caution. Their financial interests in the area, nonetheless, were so great that the very fact of their being in a position to give advice suggests that the line cannot be drawn quite as clearly as all that. The influence of Natty Rothschild in the Liberal Unionist coalition may have been chiefly as go-between; those enigmatic notes in his barely legible hand which crop up in political archives often restrict themselves to the semicode ("Barkis is willing") or the *lingua franca* of banalities learnt at Cambridge and Ascot. It is certain that his ideas were those of Lord Randolph Churchill in foreign policy and Indian affairs, and that Churchill pressed them on Salisbury; but, though Churchill owed the bank money, that dependence only became spectacular when he entered the political wilderness. Churchill, characteristically, got more out of the association than Rothschild did. Rothschild, equally characteristically, supported

him uncomplainingly to the end. Churchill was not the only connection; the Rothschilds and even Salomon were closely linked into the triangular structure of influence epitomized by Westminster, New Court and the City. This may be seen in the terms of specialized community, like the City of London, whose primary interest was inevitably its own very narrow institutional life; or it may be interpreted, in R. H. Tawney's phrase, as "that seductive border region where politics grease the wheels of business and police society smiles hopefully at both". But that depends more on personal predilection and on political predisposition than on historical evidence.

The Rothschilds remain, glamour against their will. These pages confirm the death of Natty and the rise of a virulent antisemitism in the early twentieth century (though one would have liked to hear more of the anti-Victorian variety). Professor Davis was evidently working under constraints of space, which leaves icebergs beneath the surface. Though the preface makes clear that this access did not mean interference with his interpretation, it is possible that other constraints prevented him from expressing his views more fully. This is a pity, because the Rothschilds, while as glamorous as their forbears, are often as interesting and always more brilliant. There may be a hint to start here of the supposed effect of intermarriage (Rothschild bastards, it has been said, while given every advantage at reared with their half-siblings, never shown the family fief; at a rate, it would make a gripping sequel to the saga. The *English Rothschilds*, however, ends at a logical point, but there is an assimilation which becomes a takeover. Indeed, one of the vignettes from this tale of assimilation, which recalls the conversion of the *Animal Farm*, a small pig, at waiting in Tring village to observe one of the frequent royal visits, only one voice her disappointment: "the King looked just like Lord R."

## BIOGRAPHY

## Roving recklessly

Edward Mortimer

MARGARET FITZHERBERT

The Man Who Was Greenmantle: A Biography of Aubrey Herbert  
250pp. John Murray. £15.  
0 195 4067 4

The title assumes that people have read, and remember something of, the novels of John Buchan. One hopes that this is indeed still so, but in case it isn't: *Greenmantle* is the second Richard Hannay novel (sequel to *The Thirty-nine Steps*) and the first to feature Sandy Arbuthnot, a resourceful Briton who wanders around the East in various disguises. Published in 1916 and highly topical at the time, it tells of a struggle between British and German agents to enlist the mystic power of Islam on their respective sides in the First World War. "Greenmantle" is a shadowy, Mahdi-like figure, liable to ignite the Islamic brushfire, and turns out at the end to be none other than Sandy himself.

To appreciate *The Man Who Was Greenmantle* one does not need to know any of this, although Aubrey Herbert was indeed the model for Sandy Arbuthnot. He had overlapped with Buchan at Oxford in 1898-9 and continued into the 1920s, maintaining over the roofs, walls and window-panes of tall buildings. Presumably they remained friends, since Buchan was "greatly saddened" by Herbert's death in 1923, but Herbert had many friends and Buchan was not close enough to rate any mention in this biography, based as it is on a close study of Herbert's extensive diaries and letters. Luckily his connection with Buchan, while it provides an eye-catching title, is by no means the most interesting thing about Herbert's life. The real Aubrey emerges as a more three-dimensional character than the fictional Sandy Arbuthnot, a little less mysterious, a little less successful, as patriotic, but perhaps ready to question the accepted patriotic values of his time. One doesn't easily imagine Sandy Arbuthnot as a dissident Tory MP arguing in favour of a compromise peace, nor yet as "a passionate believer" in the League of Nations.

Margaret Fitzherbert, "born long after the events here recounted", is

Aubrey Herbert's grand-daughter, and a daughter of Evelyn Waugh. The former qualification accounts for her being entrusted with his papers, while the latter no doubt explains the felicity of the use to which she has put them. The book is well-written, highly readable and utterly unpretentious in both style and content. There is no striving for literary effect, no attempt to make her grandfather out as greater or more important than he was or even to draw weighty historical conclusions from his career. The story ends as abruptly as his life did, when an unnecessary dental operation brought on blood-poisoning, which killed him within a fortnight. The author gives us no epilogue, no anthology of tributes and assessments, not even an account of the funeral. The subject is allowed to provide his own epitaph, in two short poems written weeks before he died, and that is that.

Throughout, his words and actions are allowed to speak for themselves, and the reader is left to form his own judgment. We are told, it is true, of Herbert's extraordinary charm, but we also begin to feel it for ourselves. Reckless in his exploits, generous in his enthusiasms, a myopic, dishevelled figure, blundering as innocently through the backstreets of Constantinople or the backwoods of Albania as through the drawing-room of Ten Downing Street, with a genuine aristocratic indifference to public opinion, he inevitably aroused great affection, heightened if anything by a tinge of disapproval. Whether he achieved much else may be questioned, but hardly seems to matter.

Herbert was, as the author rightly remarks, "entirely a man of his times", and it is those times above all which come alive in his biography. Times when the younger son of an earl with a second-class degree could be pushed by his mother into a diplomatic or parliamentary career, or both in succession, with little or no effort on his own part. (One learns without surprise that he was coached at Oxford by the author of *Lord Lyndsey*). Times when, without the aid of aircraft, the same mother could go out to Japan to visit her son, returning by Korea, Siam and the trans-Siberian railway. Times when a man of good family normally travelled with a man-servant of some sort; when lodging in Constantinople "cost practically nothing" but travel was expensive

because "in the remotest corners of the Ottoman Empire to which Aubrey was addicted it was often necessary to hire not only guides but also military escorts"; and yet at so many places — Bahrain, Bushire, Basra, Baghdad — there were resident British consuls happy to offer bed and board to the passing adventurer.

Herbert hardly conforms to the *Heartbreak House* stereotype of the English upper class on the eve of the Great War. He was passionately concerned about events in the Balkans, feeling that Turks and Albanians especially were getting a raw deal, both from events on the ground and from British public opinion. He was also deeply worried by the gathering crisis in Ireland, especially by his own party's support for Carson, whom he particularly disapproved of and disliked.

Yet, reading this, one sees what Shaw was getting at: the endless round of house parties and dinners which formed the framework of political life ("We decided to have a small nucleus dinner... No servants. An enormous table, crab, lobster, quails, plovers, eggs, Yquem, champagne, hock"), and even the reaction of Herbert and his contemporaries to the outbreak of war: "They were a little tired of themselves, a little tired of life, and impatient of the old men... It was as if their whole lives had been a preparation for this moment, and they seized it with eagerness."

From then on the war ("celle qui a cassé l'histoire en deux", as a French historian has called it) becomes itself the main character in the book, as it surely must in any book on this period. Fighting at Mons, at Gallipoli and in the unsuccessful attempt to relieve Kut-al-Amara, Herbert saw some of the nastiest bits of it at close quarters. It also took a steady toll of his close friends and relatives so that his wife by her thirtieth birthday could reflect that she knew more dead than living people. By 1917 he had lost his appetite for victory and began working actively for peace. Perhaps the most attractive episode in his career was his championing of Lord Lansdowne, who had come out in favour of an early peace, against the hysteria of Lloyd George may have been partly snobbish, but there was something genuinely noble about it, too.



Reproduced from the book reviewed here, Aubrey Herbert electioneering prior to the 1918 "Coupon Election", in which Lloyd George and Bonar Law issued coupons or endorsed the candidature of Unionist and Liberal MPs judged loyal to the coalition government. Only twenty-six independent Liberals were returned to Parliament. Herbert was unexpectedly endorsed and was returned with a comfortable majority of just under 3,000 votes.

## Richesse oblige

Michael R. Marrus

GUY DE ROTHSCHILD

Centre bonne fortune...  
373pp. Paris: Belfond. 89fr.  
2 7144 1550 4

DOMINIQUE SCHNAPPER

Jewish Identities in France: An Analysis of Contemporary French Jewry

Translated by Arthur Goldhammer.  
181pp. University of Chicago Press.  
£20.  
0 226 73910 4

What is it like to be fabulously wealthy, to be married to a beautiful woman of high society, and to have inherited an honoured and respected family name? One can imagine Baron Guy de Rothschild responding cheerfully: "Content et sympathique!" Head of the French Rothschild branch, Baron Guy de Rothschild is the son of the founder, Baron James de Rothschild, who died in 1813. James was the younger son of Mayer Amschel Rothschild, who emerged from the Frankfurt ghetto to become banker to some of the richest men in Germany in the second half of the eighteenth century. Since then, as Baron Guy observes, the family name has been a proverbial symbol of wealth, luxury and power. Everything he notes that money represents.

Cephalopod provides his position, starting immediately with the cover photograph, from which he grins with a little amusement. The good cheer begins with an account of his childhood's large-scale growing up in the good old days, when the family maintained the tradition of Barrois, an "upside down" in the forest, but training with fabulous treasures and the education of servants. It continues through the wartime experiences involving some desperate hiding in

1940 and a brush with death after being torpedoed in mid-Atlantic. It closes with an account of the nationalization of the 175-year-old family bank in 1981, deeply resented, yet played with dignity. Rothschild seldom has a cross word for anyone, even as he describes being a Jew under Vichy, the jungle of French capitalism, the fiercely competitive world of horse-racing, or the acrimony of recent politics in the French-Jewish community. Throughout, one has the sense of a Frenchman *très bien élevé*, whose English names must have astonished him constantly. "If you can't say something nice about somebody..."

Beneath the easy benevolence, however, lies an iron rod of duty: to Baron Guy there is unquestionably a Rothschild family vocation, a cluster of obligations almost two hundred years old, which have not always been appreciated by the world around him. First, he makes clear, is commitment to the banking profession, which he describes as times as less glamorous than characteristically playing the violin, or Paul Bocuse, or Picasso, or French cooking. Banking at this level is apparently akin to the highest artistic creativity — with particular requirements of irreproachable integrity as well as extraordinary talent and imagination. Second, there is the family obligation to be a Jewish community leader. Baron Guy assumed for over thirty-five years as head of the French Jewish community associations. Here he seems to have been the moderate, paternalistic conciliator — a perhaps not unwise posture, even if it is somewhat unpopular — given the diversity of Jewish views on Israel. Third, there are the tasks of philanthropy: the establishment of hospitals, museums, galleries and the like, undertaken quietly but with the same scrupulous regard to the dignity of the beneficiaries. And finally, in discussion that pervades this book, is

the call to live with a certain flair — elegantly, with impeccable taste, but also with panache. "Richesse oblige", according to Rothschild, possibly with a twinkle in his eye.

Inevitably, this last dimension of being a Rothschild attracts the most attention, for it requires that the family wealth should be on glorious display, rather than hidden apologetically. Baron Guy is perhaps at his most disarming when he writes about money: having been born rich and privileged, he explains, he has decided to make the best of it; feeling guilty serves no purpose, and would let everyone down. Consequently, he and his family have poured their energies into their renowned vineyards, their art collections, their stables and their legendary parties. Readers of these memoirs can press their noses to the glass and savour the Rothschild handiwork — described simply, but with enthusiasm.

But as always with the Rothschilds, there is more than meets the eye. The Baron Guy's warm appreciation of English society, drawn in part from his early education and an English grandmother, but derived also from having lived in London during the Blitz — and having never been asked for his identity papers. There is the master storyteller's eye for detail — as with the story served in an American army canteen in 1944: beef bourguignon, with chocolate sauce. There is a warm and sensitive portrait of Georges Pompidou, a close friend, director of the bank from 1959 to 1982. There are some vivid descriptions of de Gaulle, a disdained, and utterly indifferent to individuals. And there is a powerful, argued case, given in a variety of unexpected forms, for the Jewish community.

Dominiq Schenpper's *Jewish Identities in France* contains no mention of the Rothschilds, leaders of the French Jewish community for over a

century and a half. Similarly, there is no discussion of de Gaulle, whose anti-Israel remarks in 1967 with their undoubted anti-Jewish implication ("un peuple d'élite, sûr de lui et dominateur") electrified French Jews. There is no reference to recent terrorist attacks at Jews in France and the extensive comment it has evoked. This, as the author says, is the work of "scientific sociology", and as such it is unencumbered by extraneous data. Not a word, so far as I can see, has been changed from the original French version published three years ago.

Within the strict and somewhat artificial limits she sets, apparently those of a doctoral thesis, Dr Schnapper presents a sensitive discussion of how ordinary French Jews view Jewishness today, together with an intriguing analysis of how Jewish culture preserves itself in France. Drawing on ninety interviews with Jews of various backgrounds from various parts of the country, she divides French Jewry into three assimilated Jews, who have some Jewish identity and continue to see themselves as Jews despite the absence of any specific attachment to Jewish traditions; practising Jews, who observe certain aspects of Jewish religion; and militant Jews, who express Jewish traditions in the political realm. Schnapper has no precise measure of the respective sizes of these groups, and certainly makes no judgment on which of them is likely to prove the most dynamic or viable creator of Jewish identity. What she does, however, beyond demonstrating how diverse is contemporary French Jewry, is to suggest that Jewish identity will be renewing itself in a variety of unexpected forms.

Schnapper is intrigued by the phenomenon of returning to Judaism — something her interviews apparently revealed in several contexts. She found Jews from a variety of backgrounds who were "newly practising".

rediscovering elements of tradition long since buried in their own family's past. Similarly, she notes remarkable re-establishment of links through involvement with football, notably after the Six-Day War of 1967. Often this political activity prompted return to Jewish religion.

How can this be explained? Of course there is a serious revival of particularist identities in a country like France, which is so concerned with its own identity. Can the enthusiasm for Jewish self-definition in some quarters be compared with recently surfaced Breton, Corsican, or Occitan separatism? Schnapper's consideration of one obvious historical basis of change — the arrival in France since the 1950s of some half-million Jews of Sephardic origin, coming from the newly independent states of North Africa. While she leans toward a universal "sociological" theme, the evolution of particularism in modern industrial societies. According to her analysis, prosperity, increased leisure time, rising cultural levels, and the discovery of particularist identities. Educated people, living in modern societies frequently adopt distinctive cultural traditions as a more effective way of defining themselves in their environments. Many Jews, Schnapper believes, are adopting Judaism to meet new needs, generated by modern conditions.

Maybe so. There is no doubt that Judaism has been "reinvigorated" in France in recent years, and by an objective standard Jewish identity is stronger now than it has been for decades. But there is no way of knowing, on the evidence she presents, whether the Jewish revival is driven by the same energies as the Occitan movement, and whether either is likely to last longer than any other Jewish fashion.

## Flying fearlessly

John Joss

JEFFREY QUILL

Splinter: A test pilot's story  
210pp. John Murray. £12.50.  
0 195 39773

Jeffrey Quill has produced a book that adds valuable information about a fighting aircraft, ranking with some of his most remarkable creations. He has further included insights into the character and behaviour of some remarkable men, some well known, others less so. Many gave their lives to the Spitfire, for reasons ranging from the trivial to the trivial. All possess character. Quill has written of them with clarity and modesty.

For those readers to whom the Spitfire and its development are familiar or who are pilots themselves there is much new information that he brings down to earth. Without ever talking down or evading technicalities, he makes the needs of those to whom the Spitfire is only a legend and who lack technical expertise, it is full of new, never before technical.

This is a handsome record, filled with nostalgia for an era in flying that is gone, even among the ultralight enthusiasts. The pilot-like Quill was a superb pilot, a superb skill, will, and courage gained mastery — a high level of personal risk — over aircraft which designers often could not fully understand what the machine might be expected to do for its pilot. It is a pity that the extremes of performance, as they are, the advent of

powerful computers for design, engineering, stress analysis, manufacturing, aerodynamics, flight simulation, and the analysis of telemetry data make the test pilot's task much less difficult and demanding. Then, instrumentation for navigation and flight management was relatively rudimentary and unreliable, and raw skill in piloting at a premium. Today, technological sophistication has reached the point where challenges and emergencies are rare and usually controllable by redundant systems and ground help. Quill's descriptions of weather flying at Duxford (Cambs), for example, make it seem deceptively simple. His almost casual narrative conceals the terrible hazards he and his fellow pilots overcame. Readers who enjoyed Tom Wolfe's epic *The Right Stuff* will find here the same character and quality, but seen through British rather than American eyes.

Quill seems to make light of the dangers and difficulties, yet if the Spitfire really was so easy to master, there would be more recent pilots why have some more recent pilots — such as the late Neil Williams — written of it with respect bordering on awe? It was a very powerful machine, lethal in the hands of incompetents. By comparison, the latest jet fighters — excepting probably the VSTOL Harrier with its swiftable jets and ability to "viff" — are docile and forgiving. Military flying today is approached with a level of training and screening that would have been inconceivable in the difficult days of the war.

Quill's own skill and rapid appreciation of new aircraft — which were equally evident in other pilots of his era such as the American Bob

Hoover — made him safe and competent where lesser men would not have survived. He writes with fascinating foresight of aviation technology which he liked and understood and is now accepted as conventional wisdom, but which seemed irrelevant or wrong to the thinking of the 1940s. Jamming precise wing surfaces attained through under-manufacture, and tricycle undercarriage, to give just two examples, His descriptions of the technical and manufacturing problems experienced by Mitchell's Spitfire team at the height (or depth?) of the Second World War are inspiring.

He is slow to place blame, but quick to praise and credit others. He is as ready to attribute his own remarkable career to luck as to his obviously superior skills. One sets down his splendid and readable book with the sense of him as the kind of man one would intuitively enjoy knowing. Certainly, one would never hesitate to step into a cockpit with him. The description of how he had to give up description of how he had to give up the man and pilot, made his mark; this book is his testament.

General Sir David Fraser's biography of Lord Alanbrooke, *Alanbrooke*, has recently been published in paperback (604pp, Hamlyn, £4.95, 0 600 2816 8). The book, which has an introduction and an epilogue by Sir Arthur Bryant, traces Alanbrooke's career from his suburban days in Ireland and India and in the First World War to his years as Chief of the Imperial General Staff in the Second World War. *Alanbrooke* was reviewed by Michael Carter in the TLS of April 24, 1982.

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## Reasoning with the unreasonable

Alan Ryan

JON ELSTER

Source: *Grapes: Studies in the Subversion of Rationality*. 177pp. Cambridge University Press. £17.50. 0 521 25230 X

It is a moot point whether social scientists are right to spend much time on the topic of rationality. Attempts to show that reason indicates the ends of life as well as the means to those ends have been notably unsuccessful, and most social scientists take it for granted that rationalism is not a live option in ethics. Used as they are to Weber's distinction between *Wertrationalität* and *Zweckrationalität*, they have come to think that no action can be condemned as irrational, so long as it either "expresses" some value or is believed by the agent to be a means to some end he has in mind.

But it is not a unanimous view that sociologists might well be interested in the causation of beliefs and desires but not in their rationality. However abstemious with praise and blame they seek to be, they encounter too many fellow sociologists who are not. When Pareto called action based on false belief "non-logical", he seemed to most of his successors to be setting too high a standard for "logical" action – the man who believes what is in fact false, but only after the most careful scrutiny of the evidence available to him, is not a paradigm of irrationality.

All Marxists and critics of Marxism are embroiled in much the same argument. The Marxian theory of ideology – or perhaps one should say some of the Marxian theories of ideology – explains the workings of capitalism by appeal to the functions served by irrational beliefs and irrational desires. Workers falsely believe that capitalists "deserve" their managerial wage. More elaborately,

they and their employers have in the past subscribed to Calvinist or Methodist ideologies which have defused revolutionary vigour, have hidden from the capitalists the exploitative nature of their undertakings, and have thus legitimated the capitalist mode of production. The "irrationality" of these beliefs, and of the aspirations to salvation which go with them, is precisely what makes them interesting to the Marxist – the fact that the capitalist economic system could not continue if all the participants were rational, simultaneously explains why people have irrational beliefs and desires, and condemns capitalism as irrational too.

The Marxist theory of ideology is one of Jon Elster's stalking-horses in the latest instalment of his wrestling match with irrationality. In anyone less coolly intelligent than Elster, his passion for the analysis of social rationality and irrationality – in *Logic and Society*, *Ulysses and the Sirens* and here in *Grapes* – might be thought to be obsessive. But Elster's intellectual interests are so wide-ranging that the last thing one could complain of is a narrow and blinkered concentration on one topic. In *Grapes*, as in his earlier books, he calls upon the resources of philosophy, game theory, history, social psychology, and literary criticism, to illuminate such topics as why really good writers cannot write mediocre best-sellers, what the difference is between "character planning" and mere "sour grapes", why some political theories are self-defeating, and, his major interest I suspect, why any serious Marxist theory has to subscribe to "methodological individualism".

Although Elster is extremely tidy-minded, *Sour Grapes* is not a tidy book. It divides into four sections, the first a general discussion of the criteria for rationality which owes a good deal to Donald Davidson; the second and third a series of studies of particular irrationalities which are essentially by-products and which cannot be the objects of deliberate choice; the third, an account of the phenomenon which gives the book its title – "sour grapes", or, more technically, adaptive preference formation; and the last and briefest, a discussion of some of the shortcomings of the package of views which make up the Marxian theory of ideology.

It is not a complaint against Elster to say that there is no single argumentative thread which runs all the way through the book. For what he sees, as others have before him, is that there is less to be said about the positive requirements for rationality than about the various ways in which individuals and societies do not – and sometimes cannot – behave rationally.

If the book were more disconnected than in fact it is, it would still be an extremely good read – between the text and the footnotes, the reader gets something between a conversation at a briskly well-read dinner party and a seminar at the Princeton Institute for Advanced Studies, and very invigorating it is.

Elster begins by offering a "thin" theory of rationality, and follows it up with a "broad" theory – a distinction and a strategy familiar to Rawls's readers. The thin theory requires only that our beliefs and desires should be consistent, and that our actions should be caused by our beliefs and desires in "the right way", as Davidson once put it. Thin though these requirements are, they are not easy to spell out in detail, and Elster has to leave some loose ends dangling about whether, for instance, rational behaviour demands that we select the best means to an end or merely an effective means to that end, and whether and where we can rely on there being unique solutions. But this still leaves us with a pretty thin theory: for it says nothing about the rationality of having the beliefs and desires in the first place. As Martin Hollis once remarked, a man who is trying to find a large piece of buttered toast to sit on is not usually thought to be rational if his action is "rationalized" by being shown to be consistent with his belief that he is a poached egg. The question then turns on what it is to have rational beliefs and desires.

In the case of beliefs, we are not in too much trouble; the thought that beliefs are rational when they are based on sound judgment of the evidence seems the right one. This allows a belief to be true but irrational and false but rational, and leaves further scrutiny only such questions as how much evidence a man ought to look at before forming his beliefs. Desires are trickier; Elster does not want to say that desires are rational only when they are moral – he flinches at the thought of a man of pure profit company with Kant, but he is surely quite right to do so; as he says "between the thin theory of the rational and the full theory of the true and the good there is room and need for a broad theory of the rational". The man who has wicked desires need not hold them heteronomously – they need not be compulsive, nor compensatory, and the Platonic picture of the wicked soul as suffering from civil war in the soul is surely not an accurate portrait of all wicked men.

As this suggests, the obvious analogue to beliefs held on the basis of sound judgment is autonomous desires. This is why so much of Elster's book is devoted to "sour grapes": the thought is that some ways of acquiring desires are autonomy-preserving or

autonomy-displaying, while others are not. But what they are is here left "as a residual" – autonomy-preserving ways of acquiring desires are those ways which are left after the heteronomous ways have been eliminated.

I am not sure that this is the best way to get a theory of autonomy going. It looks much too vulnerable to attrition – desires may arise in us in all sorts of ways, and it is hard to believe that one particular way is going to emerge as acceptable when all the unacceptable ways have gone; and, in any case, what Elster's long and engrossing account of "states that are essentially by-products" suggests is that desires which are highly valued when we have them may only be required by processes which aim overtly at something altogether else.

For instance, the desire to acquit myself bravely in battle may only arise as the by-product of childish games of derring-do; it's not a desire I could simply summon up from cold, nor is it a desire I could come to have when I saw the implications of my other desires – the wrong sort of desire for the process to explain it. It seems to me that one either has to say that it is neither an autonomous nor a non-autonomous desire, or do something rather different from Elster and say that autonomy is primarily a feature of persons rather than their desires, and that my desire to acquit myself bravely in battle is autonomous, not in virtue of how I acquired it, but in virtue of how I could treat it now.

If I could suppress acting on it for the sake of preserving the whole army, say, it would be an autonomous desire and thus far rational. The same thing holds for wicked desires: Plato's tyrant cannot control his cruelty and treachery; the autonomous tyrant can. None of this detracts from the interest of Elster's discussion of "by-products" and "sour grapes". These discussions are quite largely self-contained reflections on particular issues, and are full of uncommon common sense. So, for instance, he suggests that "participatory" theories of democracy are self-defeating to the extent that they suppose that the overt end of politics can be the enhancement of the political virtue of the citizen; politics has to be about something else before there can be any point in participation. Mill's enthusiasm for participation looks perfectly sensible on this view, since Mill supposes that people will participate to protect their interests and inform their rulers of what they want, even though what they eventually value about the process is the type of character it produces. Hannah Arendt, on the other hand, who goes on at length about virtuosity and appearing in the public space, leaves it much less clear what the practical basis of politics is – especially

since she treats most practical matters with a curious snobbish contempt.

Again, Elster smartly demolishes all forms of social theory which treat by-products as if they explain what the whole social system is organized to do. Leibniz and Malebranche are revealed as the two patron saints of what Elster dismisses as "the obsessional search for meaning" – more vulgarly known as "it's no accident that" school. Leibniz thought that everything was part of God's strategy for making the best of all possible worlds – so that deformed children are a way of teaching midwives the beauties of normality; Malebranche more mildly argued that they were the minimal price God had to pay for the quality of the whole system. On either view, their meaning lay in their place in the whole order.

The modern version of Leibniz – or Leibniz inverted – appears in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, where he asks "what is served by a failure of the prison?" Having supposed that it must serve a purpose, he leads us (by the nose) to the supposition that "the prison, and no doubt punishment in general, is not intended to eliminate offences, but rather to distinguish them, to distribute them, to use them; that it is not so much that they render docile those who are liable to transgress the law, but that they tend to assimilate the transgression of the laws in a general tactics of subjection." What is wrong with this is that it supposes that once we've asked "cui bono?" – whom does it suit for society to be like this? – we've explained why society is like this. And this commits the worst of all sins in Elster's eyes, which is to assume a causal process without taking any trouble to suggest what causal mechanism is at work to produce it.

The same argument disposes of large parts of the Marxist theory of ideology. But readers who want to see a really meticulous demonstration of the claim that Marxism must, to be credible, produce an account of the causal mechanisms which ensure that people will believe what's good for their rulers, will enjoy Elster's demonstration that beliefs shaped by people's situations do not necessarily serve their interests or their rulers' interests, and that beliefs shaped by interests do not necessarily serve the interests that shape them either – from all of which, and awkwardly for Marxism, it follows that the fact that beliefs do serve certain interests does nothing to explain people's holding those beliefs. The seminar is an open-ended one, and it will be interesting to see whether anyone manages much of a reply to this; but one thing which we can all be grateful for is the way Jon Elster raises the level of all the arguments he is involved in.

## LITERATURE

## The retreat into simplicity

Gabriel Josipovici

YAFFA ELIACH (Editor)

Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust

266pp. Oxford University Press.

£12.50.

0 19 503199 7

Between 1945 and 1951 roughly 92,000 survivors of Nazi Europe came to America; only Israel accepted more. Many of them settled in Brooklyn, and it is in large part their children who fill Yaffa Eliach's classes in Judaic studies at Brooklyn College. That fact gave her the idea for this book, which is made up of interviews by herself and her students with their parents, relatives and neighbours, about their memories of the Nazi years. The interviews were conducted in more than nine languages, then translated and put into readable prose by Eliach. One of that she then undertook the task of checking as many of the facts as she could against already published accounts, using these to clarify the stories, but also using the stories to throw light on some of the puzzles that still baffled historians. The book is thus not only an anthology of almost a hundred stories but also a serious contribution to the history of the Nazi persecution of the Jews.

But why Hasidic? The Hasidic movement arose in the early eighteenth century in Eastern Europe as a response to the Cossack massacres, the disillusionment with the Meishah, Sabbatai Zvi, and the decline of Jewish institutions. With its messianic joy, inner peace, dance, song, and the link with holy or miracle-working rabbis, its antinomian beliefs in the mending of the "broken vessels", and its hope that the cosmos could be restored to its original pure state, it had much in common with other revivalist-pleiastic movements. It was exceptional, however, in its emphasis on story-telling, which is deeply engrained in Jewish culture and

was bound up here with the need to give testimony to the sayings and deeds of the holy rabbis.

There have been no new Hasidic stories for over a century, though both Buber and Kafka were drawn to the genre – but they, of course, were outsiders. In Brooklyn today, on the other hand, is to be found the largest Hasidic community in the world. What Eliach is offering seems therefore to be two books for the price of one. If mad Ireland hurt Yeats into poetry then, she suggests, the horrors of the Nazi years forced the Hasidim into reviving an art form that had been lost for generations. Her pages invite us to witness a double miracle: the survival of human beings under unspeakable conditions, and the resurrection of a lost genre.

The reality, unfortunately, is rather different. The book left me profoundly uneasy, and the uneasiness is not helped by the fact that its source is hard to locate. These are painful matters, but since one can offend by too indiscriminate a sympathy as well as by insensitivity to suffering, it is necessary to try.

One of the first things that strikes the reader of this collection is the utter chaos of war. Chaos as the hunted Jews sought to escape into the snowy forests of Poland, where survival depended on a moment of luck or the chance meeting with one of those rare peasants who wished Jews well rather than ill; and chaos in the supposedly well-organized camps. Naturally enough, in such conditions the primary emotions of the victims are fear and the desperate desire to escape, to survive at any cost. This is perfectly understandable. Nevertheless I was surprised at the stress in so many of these tales on the way individuals escaped and on the concealment of their Jewish identity and their use of forged papers. When this is combined with an overt belief in the magic power of certain objects the result is actually a little sickening. In one tale, for example, a Hasidic rabbi is saved because he is wearing a garment which

he inherited directly from the grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of the movement. Dragged out with the other inmates of the Janowska Road Camp and shot down arbitrarily with them, he is found to be still alive when other Jews are made to bury the bodies. He is smuggled to safety, still wearing his garment, a doctor is found for him, and he survives to tell the tale. Were the rabbi the only victim, the fact that God, through the precious cloak, had watched over him, would be mysterious and moving. But when "saved" means that his life has been spared but that thousands of his fellow-Jews have perished, the word takes on different connotations. What kind of God is this who saves those with magic cloaks and not others? What kind of faith is this that rejoices in personal safety and spares no thought for those who did not get up?

The most nauseating of these stories are those which have to do with pre-war friendships between the victims and their persecutors. The Rabbi of Bluzhov dares to go to the Gestapo Passport Division as a last desperate bid for freedom. Only one in ten of those who try their luck in this way survive. But the SS Officer in charge recognizes him, and his attitude changes completely:

"Don't worry, my friend, don't worry, my friend, just don't worry." Müller got up from the chair, locked the door, sat next to the rabbi and he too began to cry. "Don't worry," he comforted the rabbi. "As long as I am alive nothing will happen to you in this town. . . You need a nice, comfortable apartment." Müller said, after validating the papers. "Just a place to live in. The sector for foreign nationals would be perfect," the rabbi replied.

This story is entitled "For the Sake of Friendship". Equally ugly is the encounter between the Hasid and the Camp Commandant who is about to send him to his death during a selection. The rabbi addresses him, the officer recognizes him, and spares his life. The moral, which the rabbi

repeats in the interview, years later, is: "This is the power of a 'good morning' greeting. A man must always greet his fellow man." It is the smugness with which this pious message is put across that is appalling.

Indeed, in only one of the stories does any kind of real heroism, of awareness of the community, shine through. The foreman of a brigade, a certain Schneeweiss, is in charge of a group of Jews who decide to fast on Yom Kippur. The SS officer orders them to eat, then tells Schneeweiss that if they don't he himself will be shot. Instead of turning on the others, as might have been expected, he "pulled himself to attention, looked the German directly in the eyes, and said in a very quiet tone: 'We Jews do not eat today. Today is Yom Kippur, our most holy day, the Day of Atonement.'" Even when the officer holds the gun to his temple and pulls the trigger he does not budge.

Though this story is unique there are a few others which do not conform to the prevailing pattern. Stories where brothers are quick-witted enough to save brothers, where a little boy is saved by an old man in a queue whom he never sees again and comes to imagine must have been the Prophet Elijah. But the final impression is one of distaste. And it is not just the nature of most of the tales that is responsible for this. The style too is embarrassingly inept. It must have been an enormous task to transcribe oral accounts in more than nine languages and turn them into tales, in English. Still, someone who persists in using the word "ongoing" or comments that "The trail from Mauthausen to Monsey was blazed by burning fairs" is hardly likely to make a success of it.

And there is a final problem. I suspect that, despite Eliach's claims, the Hasidic tale is precisely *not* the way to deal with the events of the Nazi years. Oral story-telling is the community's way of making sense of its world; when the community breaks down, tales give way to novels and short poems. In an age which is no

longer communal tales become, not natural, but naive. That is, they feed an imagination which does not want to cope with doubt and complexity. This is not to say that there is an absolute distinction between novels and tales. Novels and poems too can tend towards the simplicities of tales, and the horrors of the Nazi atrocities are so great that we instinctively tend to retreat into the comforting simplicities of folk-tale and myth when we are faced with them. Sylvia Plath's poems and D. M. Thomas's *White Haze* are such retreats. As Leon Wieseltier said in the *New York Review of Books*: "They [the followers of Plath] exploit the imagery of the Holocaust with no appreciable talent and in the service of a *joie de mourir* not very different in kind from that loathing of life which fills so much current pornography with Nazi paraphernalia and practices." Adorno was of course creating his own poor myth when he said these things couldn't be written about. But to write truthfully about them you must show some understanding of what can never, in the nature of things, be said, as well as what it is possible to say. Amir Gilboa, Primo Levi and Aharon Appelfeld have all shown how this can be done. Eliach and her sources are of course doing something very different from Plath and Thomas. They certainly cannot be accused of turning history into private myth. But the Hasidic stress on magic and the insensitive use of language combine with the form of the tale to produce something which insults those who suffered and died by imposing on events a kind of easy spirituality. The result is a strangely repellent book, in spite of the good will and hard work which evidently went into its making.

The *International Bibliography of Jewish Affairs* (402pp. Chicago: Westview Press. £31.75. 0 86531 164 1) is edited by Elizabeth E. Eppler. It covers non-fiction books and articles "published in the Diaspora" during the years 1976-77. An index of names and a list of periodicals are provided at the back.

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## Michael Glenny: Professional prospects

There are two ways to be a full-time translator: as an employee or as a free-lance. The former work in the civil service, in international organizations, in nationalized industries or firms big enough to need a constant flow of translated material; such work is usually specialized, its subject-matter often technical or scientific, and translators of this kind are mainly salaried nine-to-fivers enjoying all the benefits – a promotion ladder, pension schemes, regular leave, etc. – as well as suffering the attendant frustrations of structured, institutional employment. Less secure, but also less constrained, are free-lance professional translators. Broadly speaking, they divide functionally into two sorts: on the one hand the technical, scientific and other specialist translators; on the other, literary translators, who tackle fiction, plays, poetry, film-dubbing and subtitling, and non-fiction under the broad heading of the humanities.

This split between technical/specialist and literary translators is reflected in Great Britain by the existence of two separate professional bodies. The specialists' organization is the Translators' Guild, which in conjunction with its parent body, the Institute of Linguists, sets professional standards and certifies its members' levels of competence, as well as establishing minimum rates of pay and representing members' interests in disputes with their clients. Of the total number of specialist translators, the percentage of those who belong to the Translators' Guild is high, no doubt because the complexity and variety of the potential work – which can range, for example, from translating Swedish advertising slogans to putting lengthy court-records from Urdu into English, or translating a Russian monograph on astrophysics – makes it essential to work under the aegis of a regulating body able to reduce such diversity to normative terms that express a fair rate for the job. Specialist translation is relatively well paid, and given the necessary skill an established translator can make a comfortable living. A high rate of output can make the rate of £15,000 and £20,000 per annum, while those who can tackle esoteric subject-matter or who translate into foreign languages can hit the £30,000 mark.

Whereas the free-lance specialist translator's input tends to come in the form of a quantity of relatively short

jobs with a restricted range of subject-matter and is commissioned by diverse clients, the nature of the literary translator's work-flow is somewhat different, usually consisting of book-length commissions, therefore fewer in number but needing many months to complete (or even years for a big, complex book), often involving research, and done largely for book publishers. Logically, therefore, the literary translators' professional body is an affiliate of the Society of Authors: the Translators' Association, established twenty-five years ago this year. Qualification for membership is simple – it is to have a complete, book-length translation published. While it acts in similar fashion to the Translators' Guild in protecting its members' interests, the Translators' Association also confers on them the benefits of belonging to the Society of Authors, of which not the least is the latter's value as a political lobby. Recently, for instance, the Society of Authors (jointly with the Writers' Guild) made a submission to the Minister for the Arts of the changes deemed necessary in Public Lending Right, which included a proposal to extend PLR to translators. The Association's work includes a service to publishers, whereby it provides them on request with the names of translators of proven ability working in virtually every language that has a literary output.

Not only full-time free-lance belong to the Translators' Association; the membership also includes those academics and others for whom translation is a part-time activity, but who are equally in need of such services as advice on payment, the scrutinizing of contracts, and support in cases of dispute. Many part-time literary translators are not in the Association, either because they don't know it exists; or because they enjoy the security of income from other sources; or because they have been lucky enough not to have tangled with unscrupulous, incompetent or demanding publishers. The Association's main aim is to make it possible for translators to have a larger and truly representative membership lends the Association much more clout when it has to do battle with publishers, politicians or the Inland Revenue on issues which, if fought successfully, bring benefit to all translators. If, for instance, the Association could impose a 100 per cent translators' boycott on a

delinquent publisher, this would very soon put an end to the exploitation and plain dishonesty to which translators – particularly the novices and the inexperienced – are still subjected; but the existence of an amorphous pool of "kitchen-table" translators means that the bad hats and fly-by-nights among publishers continue to get away with financial and literary murder. For it is precisely this state of affairs that leads to the publication of too many bad translations.

If one is to consider literary translation as a profession, its true members are those who make of it their sole, or at any rate their principal, livelihood. Part-timers may be just as good at translating, but it is the professional who encounters the full extent of the advantages and drawbacks of translation as a full-time activity. It can be done at home, and the tools of the trade are not particularly bulky or expensive: dictionaries, reference books, typewriter (nowadays sometimes a word-processor), paper and postage-stamps – just as for other writers, in fact, and like them the translator can work more or less anywhere, provided communications with publishers are good enough. Unlike for authors, however, there is in practical terms a definite upper limit on what a translator can earn that is set by the amount of work he or she can physically turn out and the terms on which a publisher can be induced to pay for it. While the happy author who writes a best-seller or sells film, TV and paperback rights can thereby multiply by many times his earnings from a single work with little or no extra effort, the general practice among publishers is to exclude translators from both a royalty interest in the sales of a book in hard-cover and paperback and any share in earnings from the book's derivatives in other media. Because publishers naturally strive to minimize their costs and maximize their profits, the translator's fee (note that word) is treated as just another cost, and the publisher's production and marketing costs are treated as just another cost. The publisher's profit, therefore, is what remains after all these costs have been taken out, and the translator's fee is a small part of it. The publisher's profit is what remains after all these costs have been taken out, and the translator's fee is a small part of it. The publisher's profit is what remains after all these costs have been taken out, and the translator's fee is a small part of it.

translators can secure a royalty is through by-passing the publishers and coming to a private royalty agreement with the foreign author (if alive); or with the author's estate if the author is dead and the work still in copyright). But this can be a complex and difficult procedure which few translators are able or willing to attempt; the only other way to get a royalty is to be lucky enough to find a generous publisher, a conjuncture which years of experience have taught one is – almost – a contradiction in terms.

The publisher's argument – a strong one – for not giving the translator a cut of a book's profits, even if it proves to be a steady, long-term seller, is that a translated work is almost invariably a much greater commercial risk than a book by an author writing in English. Especially with fiction, it seems, the unfamiliarity of a foreign author creates a resistance in the book-buying public such that the best a publisher can usually hope for with translated fiction is to cover his costs. On the rare occasions when a translation does hit the jackpot, the publisher regards the resultant bounty as his reward for all the risks he took with those many other loss-making translations that he published on literary or other altruistic grounds; the translator, he will point out, has taken no risks, because he was paid a fair rate for all those books that turned out to be flops, so he has no right in equity to cash in on the occasional success. In recent years, however, successful translators have at least succeeded in retaining copyright in their work. Previously, a contract invariably obliged a translator to cede his copyright to the translation outright (and often still does), but it is fortunately now much more common – thanks largely to pressure from the Translators' Association – for the translator to keep copyright, ceding his or her rights only (as does any author) for a fixed term in the form of a "licence to publish". While this hardly affects the translator's initial earnings, it can have a value at a later stage if, when the book is out of print and the publisher's "licence to publish" has expired, there is a chance of having the book republished elsewhere or of disposing of hitherto unused subsidiary rights; having reacquired his or her unencumbered copyright, the translator can then freely dispose of rights in the work, assuming that there is any demand for them.

Aside from the need to secure the

best available terms, the translator's chief problem – shared with many others who are self-employed – is to ensure a steady flow of work that will keep him or her busy but not overloaded. This is not always easy. There can be inexplicable blank spots in the inflow of work, while at other times too many offers come in at once, obliging the translator to reject work because of commitments already undertaken. Due to the length of time (measured in months) needed to complete a book-length commission, and the fact that the amount of available man-hours is strictly finite, literary translators are considerably less flexible in disposing of their time than their specialist/technical colleagues, whose commissions are measurable in days or weeks. This leads to the delicate question – mention of which is generally taboo – of whether the literary translator should delegate or sub-contract if the work on offer is unusually abundant and tempting. To sub-contract can cause struggles with the translator's artistic conscience: unless one is prepared to share the credit, a vast should be the sole product of one's own efforts. Nevertheless, for good or ill, unacknowledged sub-contracting is practised.

Mention of artistic conscience raises the contentious matter of the translator's status. Outside a small circle of publishers and fellow practitioners, a translator tends to be unknown and unremarked, badly equated with such highly skilled but nameless craftsmen as cabinet-maker and tailor's cutters. The fact is that the literary translator is an interpreter, an artist, whose gifts are directly comparable with, for instance, those of musicians or actors; but while the latter need – and earn – the usual psychological rewards of applause, publicity and recognition, the translator can usually expect by way of acclaim (beyond the occasional kindly pat on the head from a publisher) is for the critics not to mention that the book under review is a translation at all. Yet there is something as a special translating talent, motivated by an urge to communicate between two cultures; it is essential for the health of civilization. Where would it be without the labours of those anonymous Jacobine divines who gave us the Authorized Version of the Bible?

One thing that translation theorists are certainly not in agreement about is where exactly translation theory belongs. Some would treat it as being essentially a branch of applied linguistics, but this is vigorously denied by others. Some would subsume it under literary theory, some under semantics, some under hermeneutics, some under philosophy of language, and others again seek to avoid the difficulties involved in these competing claims by roundly declaring translation theory to be an independent discipline in its own right. Such disagreements might lead anyone, however little he knew about the details, to suspect the existence of serious underlying controversies about what translation itself is.

Translation, as the layman nowadays understands it, typically involves enterprises such as producing a version of the Bible in Swahili, or rendering Shakespeare's sonnets into French. The layman, in other words, would doubtless support Dr Johnson's definition of *translate* as "to change into another language retaining the sense". But what precisely is "the sense"? Whatever it is, we may hazard a guess that neither the hypothetical layman (if he knew any Latin) nor Dr Johnson would have had much time for the Zolofsky translation of Catullus, which renders the lines

Minister vetit puer Falerni  
liger me calices amariore  
as

Minister wet to lee, pour the Falernian  
and gear me chalices, ah my bitterest  
if only for the reason that the latter two lines are more or less gibberish by any standards, whereas Catullus' are not. How many marks an A-level examiner would deduct for this translation is a matter for speculation; but it would be quite a few.

However, if the layman is likely to be puzzled by translators' antics of this kind, he is even more likely to be disconcerted by the solemn pronouncements of those translation theorists who reject the Johnsonian notion of translation as taking far too narrow a view. According to them, translation need not require two languages at all: one will do, Jakobson, for example, without apparently acknowledging any contradiction in the phrase, speaks of "intralingual translation". Thus, presumably, the sentence *Jolus is an unmarried man* might count as an English translation of the English sentence *Jolus is a bachelor*; and Catullus might, had he been so minded, have translated his own verse into Latin. (One is reminded of the Oxford professor of theology whose research was malloiously described by a colleague as "translating the New Testament into Greek".) But that is not all. An even more disconcerting thesis, which has been eloquently championed in various

forms by philosophers, psychologists and literary critics, holds that every successful verbal communication between human beings necessarily involves an act of translation of some kind. Translation theory, on this more generous view, expands its territory to include large areas of semantics, cognitive psychology and epistemology.

Given generosity on this scale, it is curious that "the range of theoretic ideas," as George Steiner puts it, "remains very small." Steiner proposes a list of thirteen names, beginning with St Jerome and ending with Quine, and suggests that this represents "very nearly the sum total of those who have said anything fundamental or new about translation". What is even more curious is the fact that at least one idea about translation seems to be so fundamental that it has escaped all the wise men on Steiner's short-list. For none of them manages to say very much about why so many theoretical "problems" of translation have their source in the notion of translation itself, rather than the practical difficulties encountered by translators.

To restrict the discussion to one specific area, it is evident that many of the acknowledged problems of interlingual translation are generated by a conflict between the ideal of invariance in the transmission of a message and the recognition that linguistic differences naturally block communication. If linguistic differences counted for nothing, any Englishman should as well be able to comprehend the speech of a Chinese or an Eskimo as the speech of a fellow Englishman. But plainly he cannot. Consequently, languages are seen as setting up barriers, which translation attempts to remove or break through. However, translation appears to work, paradoxically, by supplying linguistic formulations which are quite different from those of the original message – paradoxically, because it was precisely the non-equivalence between languages which constituted the barrier in the first place. So the very solution which translation proposes seems doomed in advance to fail to guarantee transmission of the original message, which is ostensibly its aim. For how can a message somehow leap miraculously intact across the interlingual divide and survive unchanged in a variety of linguistic disguises?

The mystery merely deepens if we argue ourselves into the position of supposing that translation must require correspondences between the languages involved. This seems to be the view taken by Alice in Lewis Carroll's classic. When the Red Queen asks "What's the French for 'fiddle-de-dee'?", Alice replies "Fiddle-de-dee" is not English. "Who ever said it was?" is the Red Queen's retort. Whereupon Alice plays the translation theorist's trump card: "If you'll tell me what language fiddle-de-dee is, I'll tell you the

French for it." Why one needs to know what language *fiddle-de-dee* is in order to say what the French for it is Alice does not explain, but the implication is that unless one knew that, then one could not be sure what *fiddle-de-dee* meant. And how can one translate something if one does not know what it means? In short, once translation is conceptualized in terms of a relationship between a semantically determinate expression in language A and a similar expression in language B, it becomes tautological that there is no question of translating any expression at all without first establishing its linguistic identity, its place in a fixed linguistic code. When X belongs to no known language, "What is the French for X?" is simply an ill-formed or meaningless question. In this sense the notion of translating comes to appeal to a prior notion of languages as structured systems, between which correspondences may be sought by the translator. Having ascertained the role played by *fiddle-de-dee* in its proper linguistic system, the translator may then proceed to inquire whether there is a corresponding role played by any linguistic expression in French.

But here the enigma of transmission re-emerges in a new and baffling form. How would any relevant correspondences be recognizable independently of a prior process of translation, namely the process typically involved in the translator's learning the foreign language in the first instance? For do we not learn foreign languages by being told e.g. that *chien* is the French for dog? Or, if we are brought up bilingual, do we not automatically work out for ourselves that *chien* must be the French for dog? There thus seems to be a kind of awkward circularity at the heart of this notion of translation. Translation, apparently, is only possible if languages are structured in such a way as to make it possible; but in order to determine whether they are so structured, it is necessary to assume that translation actually is possible.

Part of the trouble here lies in a failure to give due theoretical recognition to the fact that we cannot assume the independence of the concepts *language* and *translation*. Not only does our view of what a translation is rely in part on our view of what a language is, but *vice versa*; and this has always been so in the Western tradition. The whole of Western education is committed to the principle of translatability, and it pervades our ordinary ways of talking about language. For instance, any layman who can make sense of the French name of any language you please, has already accepted translatability. That French may not, as it happens, have any expression for *fiddle-de-dee* would be an irrelevance. Indeed, insofar as the English language

includes expressions like the French for it, the English for it, etc., to have a competent grasp of English automatically involves conceptualizing languages as being subject to the principle of translatability.

Translatability itself, however, is clearly a culture-dependent concept. There is no reason to suppose that a lost tribe, long isolated from contact with all other communities, would have any use for the idea that an outsider, if he tried, could somehow convey to other outsiders the messages which members of the tribe conveyed to one another in their tribal tongue. The tribe might even believe that language was their own privileged invention, or a gift bestowed uniquely upon them by the gods. If so, the tribe's linguistic concepts would be radically different from those which are taken for granted throughout the Western tradition, where notions of translation are based upon the recognition of closely cognate languages, and, reciprocally, the notion of what a language is borrows its conceptual foundations from acknowledging the co-existence of other languages, into which it is possible – at least in favourable instances – to translate. In short, a polyglot civilization, of the kind Western civilization has always been, unavoidably develops the concepts of "language" and "translation" in mutual complementarity. We cannot separate one from the other. And the truth of that proposition can quite simply be put to the test. Try to imagine a language spoken somewhere in the world into which *nothing* an Englishman said could be translated. (Those who might mistake this for a disguised version of the notorious "effability" principle would do well to note the italicization. On the contrary, the claim is one about "glossability": if S is a system of signs into which nothing an Englishman says can be translated, then S is not a language.)

It is particularly interesting to observe that the interdependence of our concepts of what a language is and what a translation is fails to obtain any

theoretical recognition at all precisely where such recognition might at first be expected: namely, in the basic postulates of modern linguistics. From Saussure down to Chomsky, the major theorists have turned a blind eye to the implications of translatability. The reasons why are not difficult to discern. The typical or "ideal" language-user is conceived of as an insulated monoglot, uncontaminated by linguistic acquaintance with members of any alien group. The "ideal" speech community is "totally homogeneous" (a fascist concept of languages if ever there was one). Here the fervent nationalism which has permeated modern politics exercises its most profound and pernicious influence upon the foundations of what purports to be a humane intellectual discipline. The results are all too predictable. Bilingualism gets treated theoretically as a "freak" condition, while translation skills are relegated to the subordinate realm of *parole* or *performance*. (So, bizarrely, knowing how to translate *fiddle-de-dee* does not count as linguistic knowledge at all from this theoretical standpoint. How could it? For "translation rules" are not part of any language. Monoglots don't need them.)

What this kind of "anti-translation-theory" does is legitimize the sovereignty of so-called "standard" languages by ignoring, in effect, the linguistic condition of rather more than half the world's population, who for their daily communicational purposes need to have at least partial fluency in two languages, or even in several. These poor souls – the refugees of the modern linguistic world – constitute a "theoretical problem" which orthodox linguistic relief agencies have not yet managed to cope with. Perhaps the problem will go away if we wait long enough – until, that is, the whole of the world's population speaks standard English. By then, of course, there will be no need for translation theory. It will have died a natural death.

## John Blackwell: From the editor's desk

Complaints from reviewers about the state of literary translation into English are almost commonplace, much like the standard and repeated litanies on the death of the novel. But if the novel routinely refuses to lie down and will occasionally break into a horrible, demonic, or monstrous, the condition of translation gives rise to some anxiety, not on the critical list, perhaps, but the prognosis is not bright. It is futile to mourn the passing of the giants – Holinshed, Florio, Holland, Smollett, Pope and the intermittent marvellous sports such as Urquhart, Fitzgerald and Waley, or to bemoan the demise of that merry and accurate rubric, "Englished by . . . from the little page. There are still giants at work in the field, but it is difficult to see the notion that the translator's job has been taken over by the machine.

It is not easy to lay hands on useful statistics, and it is perhaps worth making a few generalizations. A visit to almost any European bookshop must give the impression that much of the attention within the central linguistic triangle of France, Germany and Italy is directed towards the English language. The release of English fiction in the original in Holland and Scandinavia are, or should be, of a cardinal and embarrassing proportion, as should the speed of response. Many an English publisher has been alarmed to find, on a European market, bookshelves crowded with foreign titles of which he has commissioned a translation in a third, fourth or fifth language before the typescript of the English version has reached his desk. The flow is not entirely one-way, but

would one wish it to be? (It is curiously heartening to find *The Honorary Consul* being serialized in *Navy Mir*, as it is to find a Japanese edition of the more recent stories of Conan Doyle). But it is hard to refute the widely held view that in the matter of translation, English publishing houses tend to play for safety, to steer cautiously within the predictable, and somewhat waters of the male stream. There are, however, honourable exceptions, particularly among the smaller imprints, prepared to risk more turbulent courses, and a number of paperback editors have consistently supported ventures by hardback publishers that must have turned entire accounts departments into anticipatory shade of bilious green. If the general accusation can be allowed to stand, it might be more useful to explore some of the reasons rather than to part of the field that they order these things better in France, or almost anywhere else.

The problem can be sketched out in two words: insularity and money. The decline in the scale of foreign-language translations in the UK is a direct result of the insularity factor. The frame of reference, diminished, and entire literary forms vanish from sight. (Whatever because of the decrease in the number of people able to read in a second language, with any comfort ought to expand the number in need of fluent translation; but that, to borrow a term from across the Atlantic, would be whisking D.D. And imagery is by no means the only translational contribution to translation. In looking for financial help, it is natural to turn to the largest anglophone market, the United States. From behind an editor's

desk, it seems self-evident that a translation is likely to cost more than comparable work in English. It is an expensive process – sometimes an expensive art: in the broadest terms, the better the translator the more costly. The conventional arrangement is for the translator to be paid not a royalty but a fee. Because this involves expenditure of a considerable capital sum well in advance of publication, the bluenose of interest charges can raise a very serious balance-sheet. Similar hidden costs are incurred at every stage of the publishing process, and since they exert an intricate pressure on the selection and publication of work of any literary ambition, perhaps it is easiest to break the process into segments after the fashion of pamphlets for would-be editors: finding, editing and selling.

There is a network of relationships with houses, the major capitals of Europe, there are seasonal lists, there are reviews, there are the occasional *tour d'horizon* in the heavyweight *Sundays*, there are usually people on a publisher's staff who have some sort of interest and capacity in one of the major languages. But all these sources make for conformity, as does the standard shorthand argument that resembles *le*. If you like Garcia Marquez you'll love Borges, both of course being South American writers. It is a necessary code, at both ends of the trade, but the pressure is heavily towards uniformity. How does one find out what is going on in Lithuania, Japan? Sporadic surveys materialize, from Memphis, Bulgaria, Hungary, but they have an understandable tendency to give all the entries equal weight, and in synopsis one novel looks

much like another. There are institutions that subsidize translation from specific languages – sometimes generously, but again the undertow is towards the underestimated classic rather than towards the high-risk pioneering talent.

Nor do literary awards provide much guidance. Name twenty winners of the Nobel; now name any one work by ten of them. (They have their uses. It is said that the Paris scout is an American house, eager to tip the debate in favour of a novel he especially admired, phoned base in high excitement to report that the work had won the Goncourt. "Thank God you told us in time," said New York, "we almost bought it.")

Many English editors would admit that they find their work out keeping roughly in touch with what is going on in fiction in their own tongue, and have to rely on hints from a variety of sources to point them in the direction of good news from elsewhere. If the word does filter through, the amount of sheer editorial graft involved in a translation can be quite disproportionate, and frequently meandered into a *Mandelstam* or quadrilateral debate about whether US publisher and, as often not, the author – not all of whom regularly match the icy courtesy of Borges' "El original es infiel a la traducción."

The questions raised may be found, but the frame is constricting since the text, usually in published form, exists; it has an authority of a different order from a typescript. But are the proper names, for instance, distinguishable to an English eye, and do they contain submerged puns, shades of qua-

meaning that make Englishing, when possible, desirable. As it is only the most conspicuous (and successful) examples? How does one deal with neologisms, or archaisms? How does one deal with slang? Should the argot of Tokyo gangland be rendered into Bronx, Cockney – or Maltese speak – all ridiculous alternatives, all to be found in print, if the effect of locked jawed dubbing is to be avoided, is there a neutral alternative? If the original has been worked into American, should it be retranslated into English, or vice versa, or suspended in mid-Atlantic (remembering that either of the first solutions may make it impossible to split manufacturing costs, and may thus impose a ferocious price on individual titles)?

But if this catalogue of problems resembles, as indeed it does, the publisher's familiar realm of what is the prospect of sales that can lighten the blackest gloom. The descending spiral lies continually in what high-end lead to small print runs, and high prices, which leave little or no room to reinforce the disinclination to dip a toe into the water at all. For fear of losing straight for the drain. There is no time in going gracefully broke.

All the problems are real enough, though the scale will vary from book to book, from house to house. Perhaps the surprising thing is that in the midst of these hazards the drift towards conformity has not also developed into a yaw towards mediocrity, and that there is today in Britain as wide a range of translated titles, available from many sources, as can usually be found on the shelves.

## Anyone for ludo?

Peter Reading

RAYMOND QUENEAU

Yours for the Telling

Unnumbered pages.

One Hundred Million Poems

English versions by John Crombie

Unnumbered pages.

Kickshaw, 13 Grande Chamblère,

75006 Paris.

These two pretty books are as much about permutation and reader participation as anything. "Would you like to read the tale of the three monkeys?" begins *Yours for the Telling* (Englished from the 1967 *Un livre pour l'été*). Depending upon your response to this and subsequent questions, your choice of which of the twenty-one tales to turn to next is determined. And when you have selected one of the possibilities? Well, the permutations are endless. Really keep your eye on the page of your text, but the game is actually and the idea of a text unfolding according to its reader's programming is attractive as a writer's

ultimate distancing device. Of course Queneau has been purposely trivial in the ostensible subject matter – it is the mathematical potential by which we are engaged (John Crombie in his introduction to the 100 billion sonnets remarks Queneau's "devices for maximizing the potential of his often wittily slight material"). Sheila Bourne's graphics for this first, illustrated edition are appropriately light and ludo-like.

The English version of *One Hundred Million Poems* (Cent mille milliards de poèmes was published in 1961) is a tour de force by Crombie and his designer. Queneau wrote ten sonnets of sufficiently ambiguous lines to bear multiple substitution – in the manner of a "crazy bodies" book (which influence is acknowledged in his instructions for use). Each line of each sonnet is printed on a separate bound-in strip and is thus capable of manipulation (with a knitting needle or a sheet of paper) by the reader/DIY-sonneteer. Thus there are 10<sup>14</sup> or one hundred trillion million possible readings. This brings your possible reading time, as Queneau points out in his instructions, "Allowing 45 seconds to read one sonnet and 15 seconds to turn the strips . . . reading around the

clock 365 days per year, to 190,258,751 years, give or take a few hours (and disregarding leap years and other trifles). As with the tale, the potential here is more engaging than the text – but "The bookworm's" appetite "no time can jade".

Crombie's version uses Shakespearean instead of the original five-rhyming alexandrine quatrains, and the originals are printed dimly, facing the English text. Some of the permutations are read quite coherently, or there are (particularly from the tenth elegiac sonnet) for them to stand on their own. "While death's chill lies leaves one warm limbs glaced" or "The moth's already at the windingsheet." It is a pity though, but not surprising, that many of the variations manipulable by the reader don't make sense.

How shocked one was to witness that silted that had the freedom of Mamma's seat. We all soon learned the laws of gravity. In lightning fire and sword is what some see. . . .

## The Return of Martin Guerre

by Natalie Zemon Davis  
October 1983, £12.00

"A scholarly speculative reconstruction of a celebrated episode from 16th-century Languedoc that shapes a mass of dusty archival records into a relaxed, fast-paced, and charming narrative. Davis is a Princeton historian who collaborated with scenarist Jean-Claude Carrière and director Daniel Vigne on the just-released *Retour de Martin Guerre*. That work in turn drove her to do the minute, exacting research that has resulted in this fine little book." – *Kirkus Reviews*

The inventive peasant Arnaud du Tilh had almost persuaded the learned judges at the *Parlement* of Toulouse, when on a summer's day in 1560 a man swaggered into the court on a wooden leg, denounced Arnaud, and re-established his claim to the identity, property, and wife of Martin Guerre. The astonishing case captured the imagination of Europe. Told and retold over the centuries, the story of Martin Guerre became a legend, still remembered in the Pyrenean village where the impostor was executed more than 400 years ago. Now Natalie Davis, consultant to the new French film on Martin Guerre, adds new dimensions to a tale already abundant in mysteries.

*The Return of Martin Guerre* is about ordinary families and especially women of the past, and about the creation of literary legends. It is also a remarkable psychological narrative about where self-fashioning stops and lying begins.



Harvard University Press  
126 Buckingham Palace Road, London SW1W 9SD



## Following the Latins

Robert Wells

## HORACE

The Complete Odes and Epodes with the Centennial Hymn  
Translated by W. G. Shepherd  
253pp. Penguin. £1.95.  
0 14 044 422 X

## OVID

The Erotic Poems  
Translated by Peter Green  
450pp. Penguin. £2.95.  
0 14 044 360 6

## CATULLUS

Translated by G. P. Gould  
266pp. Duckworth. £24 (paperback, £9.95).  
0 7156 1435 5

What is remarkable in Horace's poetry must also have been evident in the man. Born in a small town in Southern Italy, the son of an ex-slave, he was on the defeated side in the civil war, and occupied after amnesty a minor clerkship in a government office. Yet before much of his poetry was written he had won the patronage of Maecenas (to whom he was introduced by Virgil) and of Augustus, and he was to become the close friend of both. "Remember Horatius Flaccus as you will myself", Maecenas asked Augustus in his will. The store which Horace set by friendship – the addressee of a poem may equally be a famous name or one unknown from other sources – and the fellow-feeling which made people seek him out have continued to attract his readers.

The essential thing in translating Horace is that this gift of personality should be communicated, and it is the success of W. G. Shepherd's new version of the *Odes and Epodes* for Penguin Classics to do so. Horace is the most translated of poets and is also famously difficult to translate. He does not slip through his poem, but is there, inflected and inflected across strophes and the intricate metrical patterning. Shepherd does not try to recreate these effects. The poems keep the appearance of their original pattern through their layout on the page. But there is, inevitably, an immense flattening out and reduction of technical interest which can make it difficult to take pleasure in some of these versions as independent artefacts. Nevertheless, the man is there; and a reader with no Latin will receive a clear intimation of what Horace is like.

Shepherd achieves this by the concentration and accuracy of his language; about which he has a poet's conscience. His method is the simple one of proceeding phrase by phrase, looking for the nearest equivalents he can find, and seeing what he has at the end of the process. Generally he keeps to a standard of plain modern English. With whom do poets and literary people share their hospitable shade? Why do runaway water tremble in winding streams?

But he is not afraid if the equivalent that presents itself is outlandish, and is willing to use an archaism if it seems right or to let a surprising latinism stand. There are, on occasion, some odd mixtures of language. The poems are not domesticated, their distance from us is indicated, as it is to their closest readers.

In his acceptance of regularity and acknowledgment of the structure, Shepherd follows Pound. The conventions of verse translation which derive from Pound are in danger of becoming as ingrained as any Miltonic or Swinburnian periphrasis. The dialect which Pound invented for himself can sound absurd without the eccentric force of his own character to sustain it, and without his ear. Shepherd's good sense sometimes falters. "Believe me, he said, the poem is done" – why does he say "the poem is done"? The rhythm of his verse can be uncertain, particularly in the longer poems, and there are some slack lines. But the lines are – if that is what they are – do not set the tone, and Shepherd usually succeeds in keeping the freshness of the Poundian manner without compromising his independence of straining after an affected novelty.

The danger of his method is that because of a relative absence of technical constraint it is possible for him to follow the Latin too literally, so that what we are given is translation without transformation. To recast a poem in another language, there needs to be an interval in which the original has disappeared and the new version has not yet materialized, when the sense does not exist in words at all but articulates itself silently through feelings and images which it discovers in the mind of the translator and then draws out with it as it returns to words. The translator is freed into saying what he could not say alone. The great translations are charged with a sense of personal need and with a loving gratitude at having the need fulfilled. The best versions of Horace's lyric poetry, done in the mid-seventeenth century by Sir Richard Fanshawe, have this quality. Shepherd's versions have it more faintly: he is no match for Fanshawe, despite his care. But his Horace has an admirable asringency, and despite its limitations, we are unlikely to have a better modern version.

"There is a secret gracefulness of youth which accompanies his writings", Dryden observed of Ovid. Until he was in his early forties, the themes of Ovid's work were almost exclusively erotic. Apart from the *Heroides*, all these writings, the *Amores*, *The Art of Love*, *Cures for Love*, and a fragment *On Facial Treatment for Ladies*, are gathered in Peter Green's verse translation for Penguin Classics, promisingly entitled *The Erotic Poems*.

Ovid's subject is the omnipresence of sexual feeling just below the surface of daily life, the tension and play of seduction, the progression of intimacies that lead up to the act rather than the act itself. He writes with the genuine modesty of someone for whom sex is not a difficulty. But modesty also excites him. For Ovid, love means the obstacles to love, and it increases the pleasure of the act. He notices how the horse that bolts when tight-reined will stop dead as soon as the reins slacken; and he asks, "Had Danaë never been locked in that brazen turret, would Jupiter/Ever have got her with child?" Though he tends not to speak of it directly, his poetry is touched at every point by a consciousness of sexual delight and by the innocently irresponsible assurance that a pleasure which feels so natural cannot be wrong. It was this quality among others that made him a favourite of the Elizabethans, and it is caught beautifully by Christopher Marlowe in his translation of the *Amores*. In Dryden's version of Book One of *The Art of Love* it has been lost – perhaps because the fear of disease and a post-Restoration predatory coarseness had driven it out of life too. But Dryden's couplets are thoroughly Ovidian in the wit and polish of their turning.

Neither of these translations is mentioned by Green, but he presumably includes them when he writes with startling élan that "the traditional translator of Ovid" is "unable to count". He may be right to believe that the rhyming couplet is played out as a means of translating Ovid. But his claim that it cannot render the "elegance" of the Latin is overstated. The verse technique of one language cannot be directly reproduced in another; the English tradition of verse translation has usually recognized this. Appropriate substitutes have to be found whose formal properties are bound to be different even when there is a superficial resemblance. Green's own technique is to allocate a loose six-beat line with a variable line of between two and five stresses. The result is a cumbersome verse form which is not much like the Latin and does not work in English either.

Green is energetic and inventive, but he lacks tact and is no poet. Where there is an argument or a story it often comes across very readably. The more venerable delicacies of the *Amores* are almost completely Greened out. It is probably that the troubles of these late Ovid to adopt

the danger of his method is that because of a relative absence of technical constraint it is possible for him to follow the Latin too literally, so that what we are given is translation without transformation. To recast a poem in another language, there needs to be an interval in which the original has disappeared and the new version has not yet materialized, when the sense does not exist in words at all but articulates itself silently through feelings and images which it discovers in the mind of the translator and then draws out with it as it returns to words. The translator is freed into saying what he could not say alone. The great translations are charged with a sense of personal need and with a loving gratitude at having the need fulfilled. The best versions of Horace's lyric poetry, done in the mid-seventeenth century by Sir Richard Fanshawe, have this quality. Shepherd's versions have it more faintly: he is no match for Fanshawe, despite his care. But his Horace has an admirable asringency, and despite its limitations, we are unlikely to have a better modern version.

Green is interested in Ovid's poetry less for its own sake than for the biographical evidence which it provides. His long introduction mixes information, insight, knowing smartness, speculation and cliché ("intrapsychic metamorphosis as the trigger release of a creative surge") in about equal proportions. But Green is good at dramatizing historical situations and characters and at presenting scholarly arguments so that they awaken curiosity. The reconstruction of Ovid's life which he offers is entertaining and intermittently persuasive. His identification of the Corinna of the *Amores* as Ovid's first wife – not his mistress, as she appears – is, as he says, unverifiable, but it draws attention to elements in the poems which change our reading of them; and his account of the possible political motives for

Ovid's banishment rings unpleasantly true. He also provides thorough and useful notes to the poems.

Catullus's poetry is like the peninsula of Sirmione, reaching out into Lake Garda, which he celebrated. It is a place made for pleasure. There is always a breeze over the lake which brings the waves lightly into the shore. Yet along one side the water is discoloured by the bubbling up of sulphurous springs. In C.P. Gould's handsome new edition the poems are set out, freed of obelisks and lacinae, opposite clear, literal English renderings which are not meant to stand on their own, with critical apparatus and annotations confined to the back. Gould invites convincingly that Catullus should be read aloud; to his general introduction he adds a practical account of how this should be done, together with a survey of Catullus's metres. Two small quibbles: the rhetorical tone of the first paragraph of the introduction (which soon recovers) and the insufficiency of the section of the bibliography which lists English verse translations. But anyone who knows or wants to know Catullus's poetry – even if their Latin is minimal – will want to have this book.

## Making changes

Alistair Elliot

## CHARLES TOMLINSON

Poetry and Metamorphosis  
97pp. Cambridge University Press.  
£9.95.  
0 521 24848 5

Charles Tomlinson's Clark Lectures, delivered at Trinity College, Cambridge in 1982, and now published as *Poetry and Metamorphosis*, are a series of four lectures on the Roman poet Ovid. Four lectures is a fairly classical frame, but what goes on inside it is a bit like the semantic dazzle that comes off a sestina, or better still perhaps, off a double sestina like Swinburne's "Complaint of Lisa".

The first movement (to treat the book like a quartet for a moment) begins by saying it is about Ovid. To be more exact (for only one work of Ovid's is in question) it's about the *Metamorphoses* in English verse, and in particular the complete translation by Dryden and others which Sir Samuel Garth published in 1717. Two themes are then stated: that Dryden was "the Poundian figure of his age, invigorating the talents of others... by his example and by his personal urging"; and that Ovid was "a chief ancestor of literary modernism". Professor Tomlinson must have felt there was something too sudden in his claiming for a full stop he adds that "if the case of Joyce's *Ulysses* appears to deny that assertion, one can reply that Joyce's *Ulysses* is *The Odyssey* metamorphosed, and that Joyce, a directive influence on both Eliot and Pound, himself set forth on seas unknown emboldened by an epigraph concerning the artificer, Dedalus, from *The Metamorphoses*". So "Ovid" becomes "the idea of metamorphosis" and the book (living or not) into another, and the movement modulates on "into" metamorphosis and the change from life to death.

The second movement is about T. S. Eliot. The transition is made via the myth of Philomel, so rudely forced and turned into a nightingale (this was one of the stories dealt with in the first movement), and the themes are, broadly speaking, the metamorphosis of poetry and the notion of "the Waste Land". In the traditional manner, Eliot's use of fragments is taken to be a sign of the times, though Tomlinson also makes use of Mrs. Gaskell's edition of the *Waste Land*, wherein one learns that Eliot was surprised that his quite private use of fragments of alienation had been given this large social application. The third movement is about Ezra Pound and how he immersed himself in the idea of

being a tree (a theme that seems to go back not just to his college reading of Ovid but to tree-planting episodes and a tree-house amour with H. D. in the young prophet's Pennsylvania period), and also identified himself with Odysseus in the *Cantos*.

Those two central movements are fairly simply and straightforwardly about their ostensible subjects, but in the finale, entitled "Metamorphosis as Translation", many of the earlier themes reappear and are reworked: metamorphosis as the reincarnation of a dead writer in his translator; Dryden "our greatest verse translator" as a talent at its most personal, creative and energetic precisely when translating other people's work into English; other translators (Cowley, Pope) of Homer and Virgil; and Pound, innovating and stimulating a generation of new makers through his Chinese translations ("this first wholly mature book", *Cathay*, 1915). The work ends on a dying fall, with an ominous reference to Gavin Douglas's completing his version of the *Aeneid* in the year of Flodden (1513).

The original auditors must have been dazed by this. The difficulty comes not from the material, which is unexceptionably familiar, but from attempting to follow the logic of Tomlinson's swift and suave transitions. As my first quotations will have shown, fast ones are certainly being pulled, and this is something that quickly exhausts a literary audience (as opposed to a musical one). It is fair enough, in a way, for a lecturer on two modernists (forty-nine pages out of ninety-seven) to juxtapose themes rather than connect them, but he must make these processes sound as if they cohere – much as one makes obeisance to some higher coherence when baffled by Eliot's and Pound's structures.

Cheered by the example of Dryden, who thought a translator could sometimes invent something "more excellent than the first design" (a common feeling in the word-trade), I will not quarrel with him; but among his combinatorial arabesques, touched on some other matters which are also relevant. Rather than babbling (*c'est le mal*) about Eliot's "substituting himself to another man's metre" (sic) Dante's *terza rima* in *Little Gidding*, he might have said something instead, for example, about T. S. Eliot's translation of Saint John Perse – and perhaps the question of why Eliot let it go out of print; Pound's preference for Golding's Ovid ("the most beautiful book in the language", he calls it in *ABC of Reading*, 1951) to that "lunatic head" Dryden's ("Heaven be my witness that I, at any rate, and of all men, don't want Johnne Dryden dug up again", he told the readers of *The Criterion*, in 1934); and about Marlowe's versions of Ovid's *Eleger*, which certainly provided a stimulus of matters of no especial usefulness.

## Close things

Charles Martindale

## JUVENAL

Sixteen Satires Upon The Ancient Horatius  
Translated with an introduction by Steven Robinson  
212pp. Manchester: Carcanet New Press. £8.95.  
85635 324 8

Dryden, who translated five of Juvenal's Satires, was critical of the kind of *verbum e verbo* rendering which he calls "the phrase", since in his view it prevented the capturing of the spirit of the original (he was not, however, above introducing the odd metaphoric turn himself, such as "pollard Elephant", that is, "ivory" for Virgil's *sericeo elephantum*). By contrast Steven Robinson rightly defends the practice as a way of extending the capacities of the "target language" and the sensibilities of the reader; the metaphor respects the "ancientness" and alienness of his author, and is willing to engage in a process that Robinson calls "a continual refining of oneself out of existence".

Unfortunately, Robinson's Juvenal would only confirm Dryden in his opinion. Take his translation of some lines from Satire 3, one of his more successful passages:

Hurrying, we are blacked  
By the wave ahead, great trains of people  
press our joint.  
Behind: one strikes with elbow, strikes with  
a hand  
Some other, one bangs a beam on my  
head, one a cast.  
Legs thick with mud, soon by great heels  
from every side.  
I'm kicked, and in my toe the nail of a  
soldier sticks.

This is remarkably conscientious in its placement of words, as close as possible to the Latin, but the effect of the enjambements and the inversions (of which Robinson is irritatingly fond in his prose too) is curiously inert, and his prose too is crabbed and convoluted in a way better suited to the rigid Persius, so beloved of the hard school of the 1950s, than to the declamatory Juvenal. At its worst the new version reminds one uncannily of the efforts of a schoolboy who does not fully understand what he is reading, of the kind which so enraged Mr King in Kipling's story "Regulus" ("Tendons, sir? Oh! Stretching away in the direction of, sir"). In Satire 1 (12-13) the ranting postmasters are said, hyperbolically, to split the columns of the reception halls. Few will make much of Robinson's "This. Fronto's plans and dislocated marbles clamour by the ways and his columns, split by the steadfast reader" (Dryden: "through the thick shades th' Eternal Scribbler bauls; / And shakes the Statues on their Pedestals"). Frequently it is necessary to consult the Latin in order to understand the English.

On occasion the literalism allows Robinson to reproduce an effect missed by other translators. For example, a brilliant phrase in *Moralia* of Domitian's counsellors, *Moralia quoque venter adest abdumina turba* (4.107), not only parodies a typical epic periphrasis but suggests a visual picture of Dickensian grotesqueness. Robinson gives, exactly, "Montanus's paunch-retarded belly was here too". He has a fondness for odd or recherché linguistic choices (for example "regulate" used intransitively, "regulate" as a noun, "bursts"), but he rarely differentiates Juvenal's different levels of style, for example the mock-heroic touches or the colloquialisms in the reported conversations: the crowd would hardly talk like this: "Will you please, many I hear." / "No doubt. The kill is quite a size." / "A trifle pale, / Was my Brutitulus."

The rambling introduction says almost nothing about Juvenal, but contains many a Jeremiad on the decline of the West, of a kind likely to embarrass even the most fervent *laudator temporis acti*. The writing is almost as cluttered as the verse, and includes a number of the things utterances. ("The excess is the thing itself, at its maximum of being. There are some notes, not always quite accurate, and an appendix of textual matters of no especial usefulness.")

## Trouble on the periphery

Robert Middlekauff

ROBERT W. TUCKER AND DAVID C. HENDRICKSON

The Fall of the First British Empire: Origins of the War of American Independence  
430pp. Johns Hopkins University Press. £19.  
0 8018 2780 9

In this century most historians of the American Revolution have agreed that it was precipitated – the daring ones say "caused" – by the actions of British ministers following the Seven Years War. Thus Charles McLean Andrews, the greatest of the "Imperial School", accused them of abandoning the principles of mercantilism, under which the empire had flourished, in favour of imperialism, under which it fell apart. Andrews's contemporaries in the "Progressive School" must not have had much use for such grand conceptions as imperialism, but they did share his opinion that the Revolution was begun in England, and not in America. Carl Becker, who offered the classic formula for explaining the issue, "Home rule" and "who should rule at home", gave the second proposition most of his attention in his *History of Political Parties in the Province of New York, 1760-1776*, but he did not argue that the struggle for "home rule" began with the actions of Americans.

More recent accounts of the Revolution often feature "the people". Not that the people were wholly missing from earlier histories, but they were not the autonomous, striving, brawling mob that fill the pages of the new social history. The older historians did not usually show them in action on local committees – Becker's book was a notable exception – rather they were acted upon more often than they acted. In the newer studies, interesting and energetic though the people are in pushing events along, they do not bring

on the crisis of the 1770s. For the most part, the new social historians seem to retain the opinion that British ministries provoked the conflict that brought about the collapse of the first British Empire.

This opinion is shared by still another school, the "Consensus" historians, a loose collection of scholars who do not usually agree with much that the new social historians have to say, but who have been especially impressed by the eighteenth-century ideology, often called Commonwealthman theory, fashioned by the heirs of the English Civil War. The strength of their interpretation lies in its explanation of the passionate response of Americans to British measures of the 1760s and 1770s, by which they exposed agreement on principles of liberty and government, and also that a conspiracy against them animated British policy. Consensus historians do not usually pronounce American responses irrational – there were reasons, they say, for the American fears – and they do not argue that the fears were spontaneously generated, but that British measures triggered them.

Robert Tucker and David Hendrickson do not agree with this view, and insist that the problems leading to the Revolution arose in the colonies – not in London. Their "point of departure", they explain, is "the thesis that the expansion and collapse of the First British Empire was the consequence of a series of profound upheavals and challenges on the periphery and not the emergence of a new attitude towards empire in the metropolis". No need to resort to eighteenth-century Commonwealthman ideology to explain the fears and suspicions that arose in America in response to the Stamp Act, and to much that British ministries tried thereafter: "These same fears and suspicions, when stripped of the admittedly distinctive terms of eighteenth-century opposition ideology, form the staple elements of nearly every conflict that in its structure

features bears a rough comparison with the conflict that arose between England and the colonies." Nor, apparently, is there any need to examine colonial factions, or to look closely at the workings of colonial politics, or to reckon with the people.

Rather, what is apparently necessary is to recognize, as British ministers did after 1763, that American autonomy had attained a strength which required action to protect metropolitan supremacy. By the end of the Seven Years War, according to Tucker and Hendrickson, the American understanding of the legitimate location of power had so far departed from the British that conflict was almost inevitable, and the growth of autonomy in the colonies almost ineradicable. The Americans assumed that since they had run their own affairs for many years any change impinging upon local control violated the status quo. In reality, the authors say, there was no agreement on the status quo in 1763. The colonies were willing to accept only changes favourable to their interests; imperial authorities thought no changes would violate the status quo, so long as they permitted the home country to maintain its supremacy. For the status quo, in metropolitan eyes, was defined by a relationship in which the colonies were subordinate.

With no agreement on the status quo, the changes proposed by imperial authorities after 1763 led to confusing disagreements. The changes themselves are described by Tucker and Hendrickson in a long and ingenious account that is strikingly sympathetic to imperial policy. Metropolitan authorities, they argue, made no basic changes in that policy following the Seven Year War. The King's government had always tolerated itself in the problems of imperial defence, Indian affairs, and the regulation of commerce. The war with France and its aftermath – an immense acquisition of land through the cession of Canada – intensified the

problems. Attempts to solve them also intensified but no fundamental change was intended or attempted. British ministries may have taken the affairs of the empire with greater seriousness than before the war, largely because they recognized that the colonies had become more important to Britain than before. Others, outside the government, had remarked that the colonies were just about the only eggs Britain had in its basket. Adam Smith noted with some concern following the peace of 1763 that the commerce of the nation had now been confined to one large market instead of a number of small ones. Britain had in effect over-invested in the colonies.

British ministries felt this fear as they recognized the weight of the colonies in the European balance of power. France had been defeated in the war, but no one believed that the French had really accepted the reduction of their power. There was a natural concern, then, to hold on to the colonies, to make them secure, and to make them even more useful to the home country. New "means" were adopted after 1763, but the old "ends", the old purposes of imperial governance, remained steady. Tucker and Hendrickson do not fully explain what these old ends are. It seems, however, that whatever their character they were embedded in ministerial convictions that Parliament was sovereign within the empire.

According to Tucker and Hendrickson, in the struggles of the decade before independence both sides acted in ways that parties to such disputes – i.e. disputes in which each believes that some fundamental issue is at stake – almost always do. They related virtually all questions at issue to the larger underlying conflict over Parliamentary sovereignty. But despite their concern to maintain the supremacy of Parliament, English ministries, including the one that finally went to war, gave way repeatedly to colonial demands and thereby armed the disaffected. And the colonies, con-

vinced that any yielding on their part would ultimately endanger American security, refused to compromise. When the North ministry finally saw that it could give no further, war began.

Set up in this fashion, the historical problem takes on the neatness of a well-designed machine. For there is a mechanics at work in the model of conflict that Tucker and Hendrickson offer. All forces are exerted on a master propulsion – the axis of Parliamentary supremacy and colonial equality. The model, in its neatness, possesses a helpful clarity. The authors are especially skilful in using it in their review of the progressive sufferings of English ministers from Rockingham to North. And they isolate in a most helpful fashion the concrete questions on which these ministers refused to compromise.

The model of conflict offered in *The Fall of the First British Empire* may have value. It stands out in the larger context of the explanation of the coming of the American Revolution, but it is not in itself an explanation. Whatever Tucker and Hendrickson may think of it, in fact, they come dangerously close to "accepting the arguments of all those historians they seek to refute in this book. No historian denies that the empire was different after peace was concluded in 1763, but most agree that means cannot be distinguished from ends quite as clearly as these authors seek to do. They may be right in arguing that old imperial designs and interests were embedded in post-war policies, but they may have failed to recognize, as the colonialists did, that the measures taken to protect such interests constituted a radical new departure in constitutionalism. How things were done, how changes were made, the means used in an empire, surely would affect the nature of the ends desired. What the Americans read as changes were not simply old measures in new dress – they were changes that would have worked a revolution of their own.

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# Backward-looking pragmatists

Andrew Saint

**DONATELLA CALABI (Editor)**  
Architettura domestica in Gran Bretagna 1890-1939.  
241pp, with 347 black-and-white illustrations. Milan: Electa. L30,000.

For scope, seriousness and concentration, there is nothing to beat the modern architectural history currently coming out of northern Italy. English-speaking scholarship has been as prolific as ever lately on twentieth-century architecture and its problems. But rarely do its architects, planners and historians co-operate to investigate events as broadly and deeply as Manfredo Tafuri and his

colleagues at the Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia. Donatella Calabi's book is the third in a series of composite efforts, all emanating from Venice and published by Electa, aimed at piecing together the history and architecture of housing in various European countries from the turn of the century up to the Second World War. Sets of *saggi* on Vienna, Holland and now England have already been published. If the standard of these books can be maintained, the all-important volume on Germany will be something to look forward to.

The first thing to say about Calabi's book is that it deserves a prompt English edition, if not in its present form then in some suitably revised one. Narrowly speaking, most of the matter in *Architettura domestica* has been previously discussed or illustrated somewhere. There are exceptions; some of Calabi's own research on the 1930s in particular is certainly original. But these are really tokens of the peritactica and care with which the authors have woven their way through the jungle of British housing sources. The real value of the book is different.

Most simply, perhaps, no available book in English provides the breadth and clarity of information and illustration for housing of the period 1890-1939. Apart from the five solid essays which make up the meat of the book, the excellent standard and format of the series allow a broad range of British housing to be shown, with plenty of clear, unadorned pictures and a dense, informative and generally accurate set of notes accompanying each project. As an aid to instruction, these could hardly be bettered.

Over and above these virtues, the essays themselves offer much for the insular British historian to think about. Not that they are free from fault or problems: slanted as they are towards an Italian audience, their respectful but remote curiosity about the bizarre values of *il mondo anglo-sassone* and their adherence to the frequently tedious rhetoric of Italian academic historiography are obvious. But the book's translation without revision, that said, the contributors' international perspective makes them ask the simple, vital questions which English commentators are apt to avoid or forget. In particular, they want to know how and why the kind of housing which architects and planners wanted to see built differed from what was actually erected. Though few satisfying answers are given, ideas abound and are rarely swallowed up in the awesomeness of housing facts and statistics.

Thus Guido Zucconi, writing on the planning of public housing before the First World War, asks directly: how can the "free" house-layers and style for which British architects were

renowned in the 1890s be reconciled with the standardization which had taken hold of public housing by 1914? In other words, he tries to establish how far the architectural "research on space" going on at the turn of the century were connected with or disconnected from the planning of post-war "Addison Act" housing. Hampstead Garden Suburb, he concludes, was the unique meeting-point between the experimenters and the standardizers; thereafter, the English contribution to housing-form suffered from the so-called Edwardian "failure of architectural nerve" long ago diagnosed by Pevsner. This is a fertile if not necessarily accurate view of the problem. In fact, much pragmatic reform in cottage-building had been undertaken by municipalities, philanthropic companies and even county squires before Parker and Unwin began their work and the *Daily Mail* promoted its famous cottage competitions. The houses of the Addison Act continued this "sanitary" tradition and owed few of their arrangements to the bold inventiveness of the Arts and Crafts era. Nevertheless, we still need to understand why this should have been, and Zucconi is right to address the question. To answer it properly, one would need to be more aware than the authors of the book's earlier essays appear to be of the grey but architecturally and socially significant dividing line between "houses" and "housing".

The other outstanding essay, Antonio Manno's on the town planning of housing estates between the wars, follows a similar pattern to Zucconi's. He reminds us that the schemes of the garden-city enthusiasts were generally too costly to affect the day-to-day public housing of the municipalities very much. Therefore Welwyn and the other garden-city efforts of the time were not public initiatives at all, and larger-scale developments like Manchester's Wythenshawe and London's Becontree Heath were flawed for lack of industry to the middle way between urban density and garden-city ruralism, as proposed by Stanley Addison, as the best inter-war source of new ideas for housing development - *nuovi modelli insediativi*. Again this is an oversimplification, but not an unfruitful one. As Addison never got quite the chances which Unwin enjoyed, so that Manno has to illustrate his early and quite small Duchy of Cornwall estate at Kennington as the best representation of this thinking. Because of what was published at the time, London and more particularly the London County Council's estates tend to dominate Manno's arguments (as also those of

other contributors), whereas perhaps some of the housing of Liverpool, where Addison taught for many years, is better testimony to his mature ideas. Of the other three essays, one is by an Englishman, Gordon Cherry, and merely seeks to give an efficient digest of housing information for the period covered in the book. Another, by Alessandra Ponte, attempts ambitiously in brief compass to introduce an Italian readership to the late-Victorian ideology of the home. It supposedly concentrates on the thinking of Patrick Geddes, touches fleetingly on Social Darwinism, Ruskinism, Taylorism and feminism, but though never unintelligent is uneven and undisciplined.

The final essay, by the editor, is a different kettle of fish. Though written in a staccato style which makes comprehension hard, it genuinely advances knowledge of housing in the municipalities very much. On which surprisingly little thorough work has yet been done. Public housing in these years shifted predominantly back from the suburbs to the inner city, and English *edificados* of the Modern Movement affirmed a commitment to a socialized architecture. How were these tendencies connected, asks Calabi. Physically speaking, very rarely. Quarry Hill at Leeds, Britain's closest parallel to the housing estates of Vienna, is the only whole-hearted example, and that in the long term turned out a structural disaster - perhaps the first major *déclat* of "systems-building" in this country. With Vienna and Berlin at the back of her mind, Calabi is clearly baffled by the continuing insularity of so much British housing in the 1930s. From the European perspective, the cautious and enduring British view that modernism is right for factories but wrong for homes seems eccentric. But she is far from dismissing the housing

achievement of the period as merely backward-looking. It was during the 1930s, she argues, that a scientific approach towards housing problems prevailed over the previous tangle of sanitary, social and political attitudes. Deterioration of stock took over from control of behaviour as the main motive for building; manuals were drawn up, standards set, and for the first time serious "research", much of it explicitly international in scope, was devoted to housing problems. Thus the 1930s paved the way for the radically different housing to be built, for better and worse, after the war.

How then do the Italians assess the achievement of British housing over its first fifty years of full public existence? They are impressed, plainly, by Britain's commitment (mostly in advance of other countries) to social housing, and by the generous space-standards, the elegant layouts and the concessions to privacy achieved by architects and planners against the economic odds. But they are also puzzled by the urbanism and anti-modernism which persist throughout the period, and the primitive attitude taken to housing outside the home itself. They run up the British architectural ideology of the home in an ironic German phrase: *Alte Sachlichkeit*, perhaps translatable as "backward-looking pragmatism", by way of contrast to *Neue Sachlichkeit*, the so-called "new objectivity" or "new rationalism" which triumphed in German housing of the 1920s. To judge from the housing schemes built in the last few years, we are back now with *Alte Sachlichkeit*, today after our own period of experiment in the 1960s. Whether the second fifty years of British public housing will deserve international status remains to be seen, but the same national quirks and constraints will certainly be found to persist.

decoration of the Palace and the Heracleian and Apollonian emphasis. Hersey illuminates the whole character of Baroque allegory, although he is led, by enlisting Vico (and even Freud), to give almost as much weight to the later rooms as to those of Vanvitelli.

Of the architecture itself less is to be learnt from the book. The "numbers" title refers to the reduction of the plan to a grid system, a phenomenon discussed in some historical detail, but not, it would appear, especially relevant to Vanvitelli. Although the design is compared with de Cotte's Buen Retiro, the opportunity to consider palace design as an international phenomenon north and south of the Alps is not seized upon with anything like the minutiae of the allegorical decoration. When applied to architecture, the author's method of times leads him towards fantasy: "marble shafts are architectural half-brothers and bodyguards of human guards, servants and courtiers." On the other hand the minutiae of the upper vestibule, one of the most unusual and conspicuous features of the design, is mentioned only in passing as "vaults lifted into whitening crowns".

# In reflexive mood

Verence Cave

**FRANÇOIS RIGOLOT**  
*Le Texte de la Renaissance: Des Rhétoriciens à Montaigne*  
Lyon: Érudition. 1979.

holding the balance between historical distance and the methods of modern poetics is a tricky business. On the one hand there is the risk that empirically available data (textual variants, for example) will appear to be only a pretext for an elaborate game in which "meaning" shimmers like a mirage; on the other, there is the lapse of coherence that occurs when a precise study of formal relations admits dependence on the refractory world of the *hors-texte*. François Rigolot, who has been this risks more consistently and intelligently than most students of French Renaissance literature, compares that the title of his new book is *Le Texte de la Renaissance* is a historical concept, even if - especially if - one calls into question its validity as such.

One might add that the sub-title, *Le Texte de la Renaissance*, is an implied metaphor of an literary, sounds exactly like the subtitle of innumerable literary histories. Yet to confirm the illusion, the first chapter begins with the phrase "La rhétorique de transition..." and with a survey of fifteenth-century didactic treatises and compilations, each precisely dated. But "transition" is soon replaced by "marginal", a metaphor of writing (and of writing, in the margin, of the text) which will also be the dominant motif of the chapter on Montaigne. The transitions in Rigolot's own text are in fact primarily "rhetorical", off-centre, metonymic, despite the chronological arrangement: *Le Texte de la Renaissance* is composed of a series of studies written over a number of years and drawn together by recurrent preoccupations rather than by an overall historical or even theoretical concern ("ces études, loin de former un tout, travaillent au trou de leur étrangeté").

The range of materials is wide enough to include early sixteenth-century treatises and acrostic poems, Jean Leclerc's brilliant parody *Les Épitres de l'Amant Vain*, parenthetical, narrative and numerological patterns in Rabelais, Scève's "coining" of the *épigramme* in the fixed form of the *distichon*, the metaphors and myths of Ronsard and Du Bellay, and the successive additions to Montaigne's *Essais*. Historically, the centre of gravity is shifted in the earlier part of the period, and it is here too that the various essays are most visibly linked. The first part of the section on Rabelais (sometimes word for word) the preceding discussion of *rhétorique* in order to bring out the "textual" relations between Rabelais and the vernacular literature of the period, and so far as the question of sources and borrowings is subor-

dated to the way in which Rabelais "defamiliarizes" or "remotivates" conventions and *topoi* which in *rhétorique* writing may have a more plainly didactic function.

Subsequently, the theme of implied intentionality, which is central to Rigolot's analysis of Jean Leclerc, reappears in a discussion of narrator and implied reader in Rabelais. And in a further chapter, the contention that the dialogue between Alcofraybas Nasier and Panurge in *Pantagruel* XVII is a parodic inversion of *Purgatorio* XVII turns out to depend for its plausibility on the prior elucidation of the ways in which the second *Épître de l'Amant Vain* echoes and displaces its prestigious epic forebear.

These last two topics converge. Rigolot is above all concerned with the structural location or dislocation of the narrative, with moments at which, in particular, tensions become apparent between more than one frame of reference. In Jean Leclerc, the coherence of the fiction is disrupted by the emergence of a poetic persona subject to the constraints of patronage; in Rabelais, the narrator who parodies both himself and his reader abandons his game in order to allow the reader to construct an extra-textual (satirical) dimension. Similarly, the complex manoeuvres of Montaigne's self-apology are shown to break out with particular clarity at certain characteristically off-centre points.

Although the question of the poetic persona reappears in the essays on Ronsard and Du Bellay, this section of the book is not quite so firmly connected to the others by its themes and method. It includes a brief but elegant study of metaphor and metamorphosis in Ronsard's *Amours* and an account of recurrent imagery and rhetorical forms in the poetry of Du Bellay. The role of the first person singular comes to the surface again here, but the emphasis is thematic rather than formal, with the result that Rigolot seems only to retrace in slightly more sophisticated terms the traditional image of Du Bellay as a perpetual exile and underdog; "expression personnelle" is still the key-note, even if the expression is detected at the level of obsessive myths and figures.

In general, though, the methods and approaches adopted in this book are not only compatible but also mutually reinforcing. Like most of the variants of modern poetics, their common horizon is reflexivity: all of the individual analyses conjugate structural features with thematic ones (often taken figuratively) in order to arrive at the notion of a text that comments on itself. The common focus, correspondingly, is the precise sense in which this metalanguage, rather than being a predicate of the critic's method, can be said to be "already there", inscribed in the text as an implied or covert intentionality: "La chance de la sémantique, à elle ne refuse pas de s'inscrire à l'histoire, est peut-être de saisir les textes en flagrant délit d'intentionnalité."

Which brings one back to the

question of history. Rigolot cites various criteria in defence of readings which he knows will upset the historically minded: coherence and "perceptibility" (Riffaterre's term) are the principal ones, to which one might add symmetry - the structural patterns he uncovers are often tripartite grouped round a centre (or an off-centre). But in the end, his hypotheses have to comply with and draw on historical materials if he is to avoid being caught "en flagrant délit d'anachronisme". The marshalling of titles and dates in the opening chapter, the insistence on textual variants, and perhaps above all the appeal, here and there, to the illogical imagination of the sixteenth century as a justification for his own "allegorical" readings, are designed to lend *raisonnablement* to manoeuvres inspired by Gérard Genette and Tzvetan Todorov. History itself may only be a text, may only be *raisonnablement*, as Rigolot points out; but it is a powerful ally and a formidable enemy.

Although the problem is perceptible on almost every page of the book, I would have preferred to see it given a little more scope in the "Après-propos", where it is tackled directly but in rather fragmentary form. In particular, I think it would have been helpful to develop the thesis that the literary and quasi-literary writing of the Renaissance is intrinsically unstable and "plural" in character by referring to recent work on the humanist practices of commentary, compilation, quotation, citation and allusion. Rigolot refers to the opposition between *veritas* and *gloria* but not to the ways in which new texts may emerge from (and as) commentary on earlier texts, carrying with them the idiosyncrasies of digression, fragmentation and apology which they derive from that origin and which make them labile and many-layered.

He might well have used the opportunity, too, to clear up a fundamental misunderstanding which has set "traditionalists" and *nouveaux critiques* against one another, often needlessly. When one speaks of a text as "plural" one does not mean that it can mean anything. A plural text is one which gives rise to a range - possibly an indefinite range - of meanings, but in quite precise ways. It cannot be reduced to a single structure of thought or mode of argument; it may also be asked by the tension between declared intentions and more or less undeclared ones. To analyse these various levels, without supplanting any one of them with the "correct" meaning, is to avoid the literalist view according to which, for example, Montaigne can't be terribly interested in reading if the word *lecture* clocks up a low frequency in a concordance of the *Essais*.

The enterprise, as I said at the outset, is risky. But whether or not Rigolot always succeeds in maintaining *raisonnablement* (his readers will certainly differ in their view of this), he knows what the risks are and he takes them in this book with admirable tact and ingenuity.

# In biblical vein

Anthony Levi

J. S. STREET

**French Sacred Drama from Bèze to Corneille: Dramatic forms and their purposes in the early modern theatre**  
344pp. Cambridge University Press. £32.50. 0 521 24537 0

J. S. Street has written an undisputed but very good thesis. He has chosen the time-honoured method of cutting a swathe through an enormous field and analysing not "French Sacred Drama", as the title proclaims, but drama written in French on sacred subjects, as it might have been on Latin, Greek, Oriental or pastoral ones, between about 1550 and about 1650. For the most part neo-Latin drama, translations and all but strict adaptations of sacred subjects are excluded, so that Dr Street loses sight of tragedy as a rhetorical tool to teach schoolboys how to edify an audience and move its passions according to the norms of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*.

Almost none of Street's plays are sacred in the sense of being part of a sacred or semi-sacred ritual, like some medieval depictions of the Passion or modern Nativity plays, but there are a hundred or so of them, classified in a way which is vulnerable because not strictly chronological. No doubt hoping to find conclusions valid for the development of all French drama during so important a period, he has analysed them, commented on their form and content, produced bibliographical descriptions of all editions of them between 1550 and 1650, and provided a list of dates of publication and performance, a good bibliography and an index.

Despite the limitation of the original subject, the results of this study are helpful. The section Street cuts, in uneven terrain, reveals at least some of the contours, which may well become the starting point for a scholarly history of the origins of French drama. It would be possible, to quibble, at a classification here and an analysis there; the plays are grouped into categories which are over-rigid, occasionally overlap, and should have been more strictly chronological. But even if the development of dramatic form does not emerge as clearly as one could wish, this book certainly opens our eyes to formal distinctions which have hitherto gone unregarded.

After a brief introduction on the *mythos* after 1548, when they were banned (quite effectively) in Paris, Street moves on to the more psychologically orientated treatment by Bèze of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac. Too much is made of the failure of pre-Brechtian critics to understand that not all drama everywhere depended on the audience's identification with one or more central characters and therefore on a mode of representation more naturalistic than stylized, and no doubt, but which are not here fully developed.

... had little direct impact on the French tradition" is altogether too direct. There is an unnecessary and sometimes arbitrary severity in Street's dismissal of earlier critics, and he ignores the reasons for which critical attitudes have evolved so speedily in this fast-moving field, though he rightly singles out certain modern works, like Richard Griffiths's book on Montchrestien, for special approbation.

After the treatment of Bèze comes that of the plays written as expositions of the main Christian doctrines, the Fall, the Incarnation, the Redemption and so on. Street notes that during the Wars of Religion the Protestants, with their characteristic preference for Old Testament subjects, made much more use of drama for propaganda purposes than did the Catholics, without quite seeing why, or resolving the anomaly created by Protestant disapproval of the stage, which must partly account for a distinct shortage of dramatic masterpieces among Street's chosen sacred plays. When D'Aubigné wanted to invoke the tragic muse, it was in order to write his near-epic poem *Les Tragiques*. Although aware of the political overtones built into the treatment of sacred subjects by dramatists as late as Corneille, Street does not emphasize this side of his subject, and his preoccupation with what he sometimes bewilderingly calls the "classical tradition" leads him to concentrate on tragedies rather than the (tragico)comedies so typical of much of the later part of his period.

This is a book that must be consulted by anyone concerned with French drama between 1550 and 1650, and read by anyone working seriously in the field. It is apt to be one-sided by virtue of its subject, but is especially strong on "humanist drama" (de la Taille and Garnier), although the definition of the essence of this as lying in the fact that "action and character were firmly conceived as exemplary" is inadequate, and certainly does not delimit the category as something distinct. Related subsequent forms are said still to have "inclined to serious reflection on moral and philosophical questions". As might be expected, the material becomes thin after the Wars of Religion; will we come to Molière and Corneille in the fourth decade of the new century?

In the end, however conscientious and often illuminating Street's analyses, his necessary imposition of strict limits and categories results in something less than might have been hoped for. No real explanation is given why there was a decline in "French sacred drama" from soon after 1600 to soon after 1630. Yet evidence could have been drawn from the specialized works available on the lyric, the novel, and the spiritual treatises of the period. That, however, would come near to being the definitive work of which Street's thesis could be a cornerstone. Like most theses, this one has implications and conclusions which will grow and mature in the author's mind, no doubt, but which are not here fully developed.

# Building figuratively

Allan Braham

**GEORGE L. HERSEY**  
*Architecture, Poetry and Number in the Royal Palace at Caserta*  
318pp. University of Chicago Press. £33.75.

With so little written in English on the architecture of the eighteenth-century Italy, George L. Hersey's monograph on the palace of Caserta is indeed a welcome volume. An attractively presented book in oblong format, it focuses on one of the major achievements of the period: a building that is not, however, without some of the vacuity endemic to royal palace design. Beyond this, *Architecture, Poetry and Number in the Royal Palace at Caserta* is remarkable for an originality of approach that has far-reaching (if controversial) implications.

The largest Italian palace of its age, Caserta was designed by Luigi Vanvitelli for Charles of Bourbon, the son of King Philip V of Spain by his second wife, Elisabetha Farnese. Charles had been crowned King of the Two Sicilies in 1735, and he reigned in Naples until called to the throne of Spain in 1759 on the death of his

stepbrother, Ferdinand IV. This unexpected elevation prevented him from ever living in the palace which was being built at such cost for his court and his government, but the decoration of the building was continued for his brother, for the Napoleonic rulers of the kingdom, and for the Bourbons of the early nineteenth century. Charles is regarded by Professor Hersey - (*Pace Lord John Acton*) - as a less corrupt monarch than his father, but even though opposed to Enlightenment principles, he took a close personal interest in architecture and in the social and physical benefits attendant upon the construction of the palace. In his later years in Spain, what impressed visitors most when presented to the king's apartments was his obsession with hunting, to the extent that the monarch appeared, in nearly always, as Ovea portrayed him, in old-hunting clothes.

Patronage is all important in Hersey's approach whose originality lies in the lucid and ingenious if of the building in relation to intellectual development in Naples, and more specifically to the views on myth and government of the contemporary Neapolitan philosopher, Giovanni Battista Vico. Some

readers will no doubt find what I have done too different from the source-hunting, style-distinguishing and influence-tracing that dominate the practice of art-history nowadays. But times have surely changed since such a description was broadly true.

Following his declared line of approach, Hersey concentrates on the figurative decoration of the gardens and the palace, rather than on the architecture itself: the heart of the book, a chapter entitled "The River Road" is an extended, virtuosic analysis of the fountains, their progression as a historical sequence, and their relation to the patron and his dynasty. Neptune emerges over earth and air and over the fires of hell and Venus. He shelters Diana, quenches Yggis' monstrous Ceres, and short-circuits Aeolus's attack on Aeneas. It is with Neptune, chief god of the Bourbon's maritime kingdom, that we reckon in the end. At times the analysis seems to be carried too far and Vico's name is continually invoked without any real evidence of the exact nature of his involvement. The comparative absence of references to the development of fountain decoration generally also diminishes the full impact of what was evidently the most ambitious of all time: many fountain schemes of the time. By contrast, when he discusses the

decoration of the Palace and the Heracleian and Apollonian emphasis. Hersey illuminates the whole character of Baroque allegory, although he is led, by enlisting Vico (and even Freud), to give almost as much weight to the later rooms as to those of Vanvitelli.

Of the architecture itself less is to be learnt from the book. The "numbers" title refers to the reduction of the plan to a grid system, a phenomenon discussed in some historical detail, but not, it would appear, especially relevant to Vanvitelli. Although the design is compared with de Cotte's Buen Retiro, the opportunity to consider palace design as an international phenomenon north and south of the Alps is not seized upon with anything like the minutiae of the allegorical decoration. When applied to architecture, the author's method of times leads him towards fantasy: "marble shafts are architectural half-brothers and bodyguards of human guards, servants and courtiers." On the other hand the minutiae of the upper vestibule, one of the most unusual and conspicuous features of the design, is mentioned only in passing as "vaults lifted into whitening crowns".

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wenn man mit größerer als der gewöhnlichen Bedeutung erkennt, dass man ja mehr Kraft als Bedürfnis hat, die schnellste Veränderung leicht zu bewirken und zu ertragen" (*Der plötzliche Spaziergang*)

when you recognize with more than usual significance that your strength is greater than your need to accomplish effortlessly the swiftest of changes and to cope with it" (Edwin and Willa Muir)

assessment of narrative perspective in Kafka's writings. To translate "Das Volk hört sie an und geht darüber hinweg" (present tense, to indicate continuous and repeated action), "I listened to her and took no notice of what she said" would be wholly indefensible. The Muirs once again have it exactly right: "The people listen to her arguments and pay no attention."

\* Again and again we find the Muirs much truer to their own

Again and again we find the Mulras much truer to their author, or just

In his admirable account of Kafka's letters to his fiancée Felice Bauer in *Kafka's Other Trial*, Elias Canetti has shown not only how much light these letters throw on Kafka's work and personality, but also to how large an extent they can be regarded as literary works in their own right. This is no less true of the letters Kafka wrote towards the end of his life to his Czech

But why, oh why, when the translator rightly included this passage, did he omit the parallel passage in which Kafka subjects a German word "trotzdem", to the same treatment he has here given the Czech word "nechápu", explaining to Milena that "trotz" gives a sensation of colliding with a world that is still present while "dem" suggests sinking down into the nothingness which, in the end, is all that remains?

brine characters with whom Joseph K. and is later whipped a character significantly named "Franz!" And if so, must one not anglicize Kafka's own first name on the cover of the book in order to point up to its identity with that of a character now called "Franz" Underwood's obviously justified decision to leave *Kafka's* German first name in its original German form ("The Stoker") also helps to suggest how difficult it is to anglicize the name. Kafka uses with any degree of consistency, if not with any preference, therefore, is for "Georg" rather than "George," "Bend Sinas" for "Gregory," rather than "Gregory," "Samsa, and for-

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of novels that made Kafka post-  
modern world-famous. (*Der Verur-  
teilte*, "Lost Without Trace", was  
his name for the novel which Brod  
called *Amerika*.) The first volume  
contains the text; the second  
contains the apparatus recording  
all alterations and reproducing  
the passages which he excised, along  
with introductions in which the editors  
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methods, and reconstruct the  
composition of the novels. The  
apparatus is keyed to the text by page  
number, and by lemma,  
making it easy to compare any variant

there are more far-reaching differences between Kafka's original and those of subsequent editions. Some of these differences can be traced from the opening paragraph of *Schloss*. Here is the hitherto standard text (Fischer, 1951):

Am Abend, als K. ankam, lag das Dorf in tiefem Schnee. Vom Schlossberg war nichts zu sehen, nur die umliegenden Finsternisse umgaben

ndly, this short passage contains punctuation errors that no Audent would get away with. A punctuation follows strict intention to clarify the syntactic re of the sentence, and work these rules in: inserting s between: Kafka's main, and inate places. But Kafka's own standing appears to follow the is of speech. After two abrupt ructive sentences, the paragraph as into a series of main clauses. flow receives the briefest interruptions, indicated by is instead of full stops; while sentence, lacking internal

child feature that deserves to have survived Kafka's revisions, since it betrays the author's *Schloss*. The debatable issue in studies of his novels are narrated. A long-orthodox maintains that the presented solely from the view- of the hero; with no indepen- narrator to supply privileged the reader helplessly the hero's perplexity. It has argued that the world of *Das* has no existence save as the of K.'s mind. Some years

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for the independent reality of  
age and the Castle. The  
ements of K.'s brain. K.'s  
tation of them may well be  
able, but the presence of  
e narrator from the outset  
the reader to construct a  
nterpretation in which, as  
ard has argued, "the Castle  
ities belie their appearance and  
obsession with them can be  
ded from a sceptical distance.  
has not composed an insoluble  
he is a much more remote  
of Beckett than has usually  
pposed:

rettably, the critical edition will  
nclude *Der Prozess*, the  
ripter of which is still in private  
in Israel and has not been made  
able. The next volume to appear  
tain the works published during  
s lifetime: The letters, diaries  
notebooks will follow, replacing  
present: woefully incomplete  
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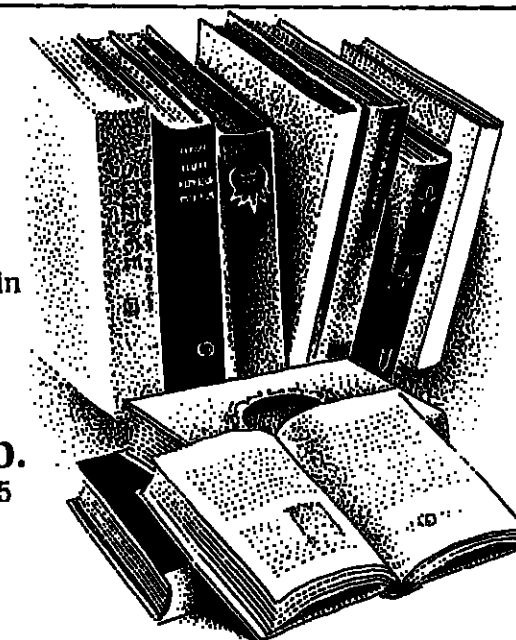
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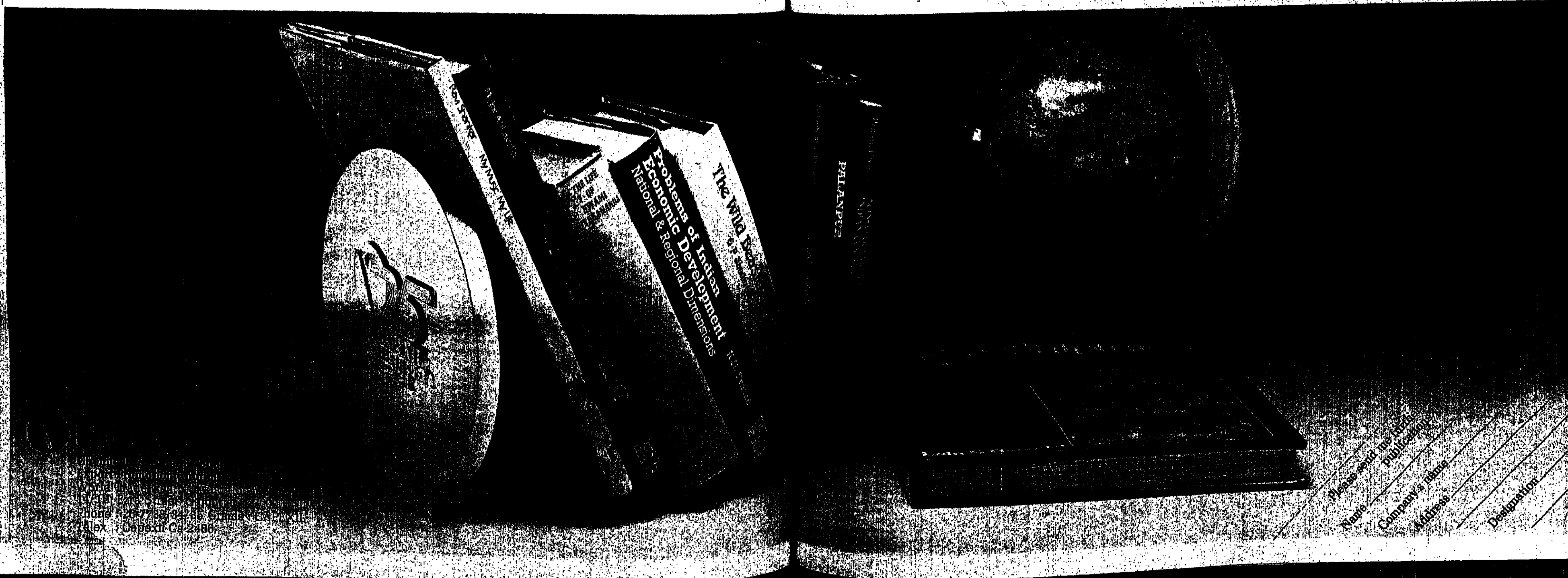
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# Archives of Africa in Oxford

Ingrid Thomas and Alan Bell

There is no formally constituted "African Studies Centre" at Oxford, such as are found at several other British universities, yet it has a number of institutions which make it very much a centre for African studies, with a long-standing tradition of teaching and research, and a full array of library resources to support advanced study in a wide range of subjects. Since its foundation over fifty years ago Rhodes House Library – the American and Commonwealth studies section of the Bodleian – has had a special responsibility for manuscript material of African interest, as shown by its major holdings of Livingstone correspondence, its Anti-Slavery Society archives, and of course its Cecil Rhodes papers, to choose only a few examples from earlier acquisitions.

In 1963 the archive side of Rhodes House Library's work was transformed by the foundation of the Oxford Colonial Records Project, for which it became the principal destination for manuscript material solicited from all then traceable former officials of the old Colonial Office territories – a wide geographical spread, in which Africa was naturally the largest element. Oxford's role in administrative training courses made it an obvious centre; historians (including Margery Perham) were there to advise, and an experienced administrator was to hand in J. J. Tawney, whose energy and skill elicited so many deposits from his former Colonial Service colleagues. The results of a decade's work by the Colonial Records Project may be seen in the summary catalogues of *Manuscript Collections: Africa* compiled by the then Rhodes House Librarian, Louis B. Fawcett, and published by the Bodleian in 1968, with two supplements (1971 and 1978); a further supplement is now being prepared.

The OCRP was run on a shoestring

budget, yet it was astonishingly successful in gathering documents from a widespread but loyal constituency of retired officials. It was far-sighted in its attention to oral history, conducting a series of interviews to complement the archival material which it collected. The manuscripts themselves – ranging from District Officers' letters home, personal correspondence files, diaries, photograph albums and "handing-over" notes, to Governors' papers at a higher level of policy-making – have already shown their importance in countless theses and books, and they have much more to yield to historians.

The Colonial Records Project was wound up in 1972, with Rhodes House Library continuing to receive and process the further donations which had arrived as a result of the Project's instigation. It soon became clear that the period between the end of the Second World War and the advent of Independence was under-represented in these collections, and that the papers of a later generation of colonial administrators were of potential interest not only to historians but even possibly for the guidance of those involved in later development planning in Africa. A new undertaking – the Oxford Development Records Project – was therefore begun to complement the earlier scheme, this time with an emphasis on a number of selected themes in development work, such as the intensification of African agriculture in Kenya (the Swynnerton plan), education at all levels from primary school administration to the setting up of universities, and the transfer of power in Nyasaland (now Malawi).

Over the years Rhodes House Library has had to deal with some very sizeable collections, such as the records of the Fabian Colonial Bureau (and the papers of Arthur Creech Jones), and

the Africa Bureau's archives with their full record of the work in southern Africa of the late Revd Michael Scott and his associates. Inventories of these and other collections were compiled by archivists funded mainly by outside foundations, and similar support had to be sought when the library was faced with the papers of Dame Margery Perham, by far the largest bequest it has ever received. Dame Margery's long and active career as historian and commentator on African affairs, as instructor of administrators and monitor of governors, and as friend and biographer of Lord Lugard, produced a vast quantity of documentation which came to Rhodes House after her death. At present the Perham papers after a first sorting find over 600 standard archive boxes. With acquisitions on this scale (A.T. Maitson's historical collections and correspondence relating to Kenya may also be mentioned as another very recent large acquisition), space is rapidly running out, and urgent problems of additional accommodation will soon have to be faced.

From a conservationist's point of view, the materials gathered by the Projects already give much cause for concern. The quality of paper used by

colonial administrators was not high, and the masses of carbon-copy correspondence on flimsies, the typewriter papers, and the manila folders that contain them are noticeably sour and brittle, with the certainty of further chemical deterioration. The sheer quantities involved make leaf-by-leaf conservation impractical for the foreseeable future, and a large-scale programme of security microfilming seems the best precaution. Fortunately the interest being shown by several African nations in securing copies of documents relating to their territories provides a further impetus to such an enterprise. Several collections are already too fragile for frequent handling and the availability of microforms in appropriate national archives in Africa may help to reduce wear and tear; others will have to be locked away with only the copies available for consultation.

Special conservation measures are also being planned to deal with the library's photographic collections – over 40,000 prints of all periods, with some important collections of early negatives. Tape recordings also need special care, and many of the early Colonial Records Project recordings have already been transferred to

better-quality tapes for longer preservation.

Such work inevitably requires money, time and staff, and all are in short supply. Nevertheless it is possible to make some progress in housekeeping with very limited resources. In the immediate future, existing funding for the Oxford Development Records Project is due to run out in mid-1984, except for the final stages of its publication programme – though an effort will certainly be made to seek further support to continue some aspects of the Project's work.

The international research community attracted to Rhodes House Library every year shows again how important are the records of colonial administrators, with their working papers, diaries and private correspondence, in complementing the official Colonial Office papers in the Public Record Office. It would be the greatest of plagues if any opportunity were lost to improve the already rich stock of these archives of the British experience in the nineteenth century has, however, gone some of the way to vindicating Herschel: microforms began making their first practical contribution in 1914 when 35mm roll film was used to record documents as an insurance against the ravages of war. In the late 1930s microforms advanced a stage further when American entrepreneurs – the most notable being Eugene Power – began using microforms as a medium to supply the way but rapidly growing libraries in the United States with copies of rare and irreplaceable documents in European institutions.

Microforms now occupy a small but well-defined niche in the world of libraries and publishing. The term microfilm has been coined to embrace all media which involve the reduction of text to a size where it is unreadable to the unaided eye. The three major media now in use comprise 35mm and 16mm roll film and microfiche. 35mm

to come up with a product that is own market. Archival material is a prime subject. It is often bulky and difficult to store, with only limited interest, rarely of wide enough appeal to carry the cost of conventional publication, or indeed the cost of keyboarding or scanning for storage in machine-readable form for computer access. Sometimes the owners of the archives themselves have their material microfilmed for rapid access, and to save on wear and tear of the original documents, and thus save or all of the cost of filming is covered by the publisher still needs to invest in the publication – for besides the straight filming it must be planned carefully to fit the medium and will usually require the "added value" of an index. The overtones involved in this and the marketing can be surprisingly high in relation to the small number of orders, which is why microform publishers look for large projects justifying sufficiently high-selling prices to cover these overheads.

The somewhat buccaneer image of the early microform publishers who sought the easy collection or even reproduced microfilm originally intended for archival use as opposed to the publication has changed. The microform publishers have largely reformed, to become a genuine publishing community employing their medium creatively. For example, the inherent problems in listing or producing a concordance (a listing of index of words in context) has in the past limited this method of studying text to the Bible. But there are now well-established computer programs for concordancing large bodies of text. The cost of publishing the resulting long lists printed out from the computer by conventional means is still prohibitive. The concordance can, however, be produced on COM (computer output microfilm) and in this form it can be published as a fraction of the cost of conventional printing. This opens up a whole new world of possibilities for concordances for textual, language and concordance studies. The first COM concordance was in Roman Law and was published by the Clarendon Press with the help of Oxford Microform Publications. Such was the success of this venture that Oxford Microform Publications have gone on to develop a series of concordances starting with the works of Virginia Woolf, using the WATCON concordance-generation program package from the University of Waterloo. What Virginia Woolf would make of WATCON one can only imagine, but it does show that microforms can make a valuable contribution to the publishing process.

## Faith in the medium

Robert Campbell

When the late Sir Arthur Norrington started as an editor at Oxford University Press he was faced with a room full of manuscripts that had accumulated, often without acknowledgment, under his predecessor. He told me that it was the hardest year of his life working through those teetering piles of typescript, seeking opinions, submitting reports to the Delegates and so on, but his career in publishing was not over yet. He and a colleague stood by the fire of the now empty room and shared a bottle of sherry to celebrate the achievement. He placed one foot on the coal-scuttle which had been revealed beneath the papers, then kicked it to see if it might still contain any coal for the fire. Two manuscripts slid out.

Publishing has changed since, but not enough according to Kenneth Baker, who has ministerial responsibilities for information technology and the publishing industry. He has been haranguing publishers over their failure to innovate, and seize the opportunities offered by new technology. Perhaps if he actually made real funds available to finance new ventures we could move forward more quickly but at present we have to make a living by what we sell. The market dictates our programs and generally "users", as information scientists call them, prefer to read books or "hard-copy" rather than screens, although in the sciences there are signs of change, particularly in North America.

Possibly the recent sharp decline in library spending could jolt the publishing community into using new media. Certainly the scare in 1973-4 when the oil crisis led to a sharp rise in the price of books and a drop in sales made a number of publishers seriously consider a new medium and then the only alternative to print on paper was microforms.

I was involved in setting up a microform (essentially microfiche) production and distribution company in those days, and we were visited almost daily by publishers and learned societies – both from the United Kingdom and abroad, all wanting to explore the publishing potential of microfiche. A very small percentage actually went ahead with a microform project and the level of activity in microform publishing has remained more or less steady. Perhaps if at least 25 per cent of those publishers who visited us had initiated a microform series then our libraries would look very different now.

Those involved in microform publishing still believe in the medium, despite the frustration by the limited number of viewing devices and

continue to dream of the day when a major organization decides to invest heavily in a microform project, and thus force microfiche out of its dark corners to become a genuine consumer product. (The latest ray of hope is the rumour that Kodak have patented equipment which takes their disc film and displays it on a television; such a device could be easily converted for microfiche.) They cling to the principle that the text is all that matters and not its physical form, as characterized by Michel Butor in *Inventories*:

The fact that the book, as we know it today, has rendered the greatest services to the mind for several centuries in no way implies that it is indispensable. A civilisation of the book might well be replaced by a civilisation of recordings. Mere sentimental attachment, like the kind our grandparents cultivated for a whilst for some years obviously reserved more than an indulgent smile; I once knew an old lady who claimed that an icebox produced a better quality of cold than a refrigerator.

The role of microforms probably lies in storing texts of insufficient appeal to justify conventional publication for printing out through the fairly common photocopier/viewer devices. Reading photocopies is preferable to peering at an illuminated screen. In this way microforms can establish their own appeal: they have to be searched, hunted for, they cannot be enjoyed passively like conventional printed text. Saul Bellow uses this in his novel *Mr Sammler's Planet*: the hero, old, alienated (from Chicago) and omniscient (having been personally involved in every major twentieth-century crisis) is ending his days going downtown to the library every afternoon to read Melville Eckhart in Latin on microfilm. The microfilm is housed in its own hostile, location, where Chicago is the outer casing which Sammler has to penetrate at his risk, and the microfilm is consulted after a pilgrimage, like the oracle.

The microform publishers, therefore, have two tasks: firstly, to reduce the physical barrier between the reader and the text by encouraging the development of better viewers; and, secondly, to collect or create material of sufficient interest, albeit specialized, to induce people to use their medium. There is evidence that younger generations, more accustomed to the microcomputer, which, by comparison, renders the microform viewer clumsy and dated, are now superseding the publishers' role with their last resource, their ability

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# Microforms, pro and contra

Bernard J. S. Williams

In the world of scholarship, microforms have remained something of an anomaly for well over a century. The development of microforms virtually encompasses the development of photography itself: as early as 1839 the British inventor of microphotography – John Benjamin Dancer of Manchester – used the eyes of recently killed animals as lenses to produce minute photographic pictures. From the start, microforms have been the one hand, enthusiasm and, on the other, a mixture of apathy, reluctance and occasionally outright hostility from the rest of the scholarly world.

Within fourteen years of their invention the nineteenth-century astronomer Sir J. F. W. Herschel was enthusiastically promoting the use of microforms for publishing, while a contemporary dictionary of photography dismissed them as "amusing curiosities". In the context of nineteenth-century scholarship the dictionary proved wholly correct. The present century has, however, gone some of the way to vindicating Herschel: microforms began making their first practical contribution in 1914 when 35mm roll film was used to record documents as an insurance against the ravages of war. In the late 1930s microforms advanced a stage further when American entrepreneurs – the most notable being Eugene Power – began using microforms as a medium to supply the way but rapidly growing libraries in the United States with copies of rare and irreplaceable documents in European institutions.

Microforms now occupy a small but well-defined niche in the world of libraries and publishing. The term microfilm has been coined to embrace all media which involve the reduction of text to a size where it is unreadable to the unaided eye. The three major media now in use comprise 35mm and 16mm roll film and microfiche. 35mm

roll film is the pioneer medium – it was 35mm roll film which was used at the time of the First World War for preservation purposes. It is still the only medium which can cater easily for all classes of documentation. The relatively large frame size makes possible the recording of such items as a seventeenth-century broadsheet newspaper (probably in poor condition) at a modest reduction to achieve the optimum quality. For these reasons it remains the primary preservation medium used in libraries – the British Library Newspaper Division library in Colindale, for example, contains 140,000 reels of 35mm film. Yet in many other ways modern developments in the use of microfilm have passed by 35mm roll film.

The use of film in business and commerce is based on 16mm roll. Cartridges and cassettes – which are virtually unknown for 35mm film – are widely used to make the loading of reading equipment comparable to the loading of a modern cassette tape recorder. The film is frequently coded with image marks on each frame to make access on modern microchip-controlled reading equipment swift and easy. Increasingly the reading equipment is itself controlled by a microcomputer – in these systems the computer is used for indexing a collection of documents, the 16mm film for storage of the originals.

The microfiche – a flat sheet of film usually measuring 105 by 148mm and containing up to 420 pages of information – plays a major role in the scholarly publishing of specialized material. On microfiche you could, for example, have access to Christie's auction records, including a photograph and data on each item auctioned, for the past century, or you could examine a collection of medieval manuscripts, reproduced in colour. Modern aids available parallel those for 16mm film – the *Daily Mirror* for instance keeps its press clippings

file on microfiche which are automatically accessed by a computer-driven system. Reviewing the contribution made by microforms to scholarship produces some interesting results: on the positive side they have undoubtedly rendered specialized material much more accessible – they have opened the contents of documents and collections which were closed to everyone except the researcher ready and able to travel the world to seek out originals. Similarly, microforms have kept material available long after the original publications went out of print. *The Times Literary Supplement* is among thousands of newspaper and serial titles which remain available to libraries as back-runs on microform. Microforms can make this valuable contribution to scholarship because the cost of making master negatives is infinitesimal compared to conventional reprinting. Many major microform publishers work to "break even" sales of only ten copies in recouping the cost of the original recording (this aspect of microform publishing can make it a surprisingly lucrative business).

The case for using microforms as a preservation medium has also strengthened since 1914: the dangers of losing documents due to natural or man-made disasters remain as great as ever but two new aspects of preservation have emerged since then. Firstly, paper deterioration has become an increasing problem – modern paper with its built-in impurities might almost have been designed to "self-destruct" within an increasingly limited time-span. Secondly the increasing army of researchers (ranging from school children doing projects to authors writing books) have created massive problems of wear and tear on originals.

Useful as these two contributions are, there is of course a "flip-side" to the case: many users do not like reading from microforms; many researchers insist on their need to handle originals. To take the second issue first: most conservationists would now argue that unless researchers have a credible need to handle originals they should, not to mince words, put up with any inconvenience, real or imagined, associated with using microforms. Most research is more concerned with information content than with physical bibliography – as long as the microform has reproduced the information content for optimum readability (unfortunately many originals are allowed to deteriorate before filming), the researcher should have no real objection to using the microform version.

How sensible is the objection to reading from microforms? It would be very difficult to argue that a microform-reader or, for that matter, an electronic display is easier on the eyes than a book. The need to use an optical or electronic display imposes constraints that are generally lacking when reading from paper. Firstly the reader will have to accommodate him or herself to the reading surface – there have been attempts to produce the archly named "cuddly" reading equipment which can be held in the lap like a book, but none have achieved real success (although there is much to be said for light, compact readers which can be moved around on a desk to suit personal convenience). Similarly it is much more difficult to flip through the frames of a microform than the pages of a book.

Nevertheless the modern microform reader is a vast improvement over its predecessor of twenty years ago. It can be used in normal ambient light conditions – there is thus no need for microform reading to be reminiscent of one's last visit to the local cinema. Modern readers are indisputably better value for money and provide a variety of configurations – for intensive study over a prolonged period a front-projection

reader with a near-to-horizontal screen will prove much less tiring than a reader with a vertical screen.

If a document is conceived in the first place for publication on microform there are numerous ways of tailoring the presentation to match the characteristics of the microform. The increasing use of word processors in creating documents enables the microform to be produced directly from the digital data via a COM (computer output microfilm) record. Since the text-size and presentation can then be designed specifically for microform the end-product will generally represent an improvement over the recording of a printed document. COM recording is competitive with conventional micro-reording for text, but there are some economic barriers to handling illustrated documents, especially those containing photographs.

Although there are significant technical developments still taking place – within micro-reproduction (notably the emergence of processes which provide for the instant and dry recording of documents – the microfilm camera equivalent of an office copier) the major changes affecting microforms are external to the technology itself. The days when the various methods of creating, reproducing, storing and retrieving documents stood alone as distinct technologies are past. This trend, often labelled "technology convergence" in the microforms field, has recently led to two of the world's major professional microform associations dropping the reference to micro-graphics in their titles in favour of "information management". The technology convergence which affects the microforms business is really an aspect of the new technology which threatens or promises (depending of course on your point of view) revolutionary changes within the world of publishing.

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## Miseries of the moment

G. P. Butler

UWE JOHNSON

Jahrestage 4  
514pp. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp  
3 £18 03330 1

Responding to the plaudits and the brickbats which greeted his first novel, Uwe Johnson claimed he had written it "as if people would read it as slowly as I wrote it". That was in 1959, Johnson was twenty-five and the claim, stripped of hyperbole, made some sense: to read the longish *Mümmensleben über Jakob* quickly is to court confusion, at least part of which is dispelled if you try again, *adagio* - approaching the text as attentively as, say, Gesine Cresspahl and her school-mates in *Jahrestage* are taught to approach Fontane's shortish *Schach von Wuthenow*. Essentially, Johnson's narrative strategies, and therefore the kinds of input he doubtless expects from his readership, have changed very little over the years. He tells his tales in scattered fragments, splinters ("Spittertechnik", one critic called it), leaving it largely to the studious public to piece them together.

And that is one of the troubles with his latest book: few but the studious and leashed, having reached what appears to be the end, are likely to be able to start again - at all, let alone at the author's own creative pace. Plenty of the bits and pieces that go to make up *Jahrestage* are eminently re-readable; but the whole is a huge, intricate, unshapely conglomerate, much of it already unavoidably dated, and much no less in need of annotation, glossaries, an index, than Grass at his most cryptic. (The need is amply acknowledged in Rolf Michaelis's forthcoming *Kleines Adressbuch für Jerchow und New York: Ein Register zu Uwe Johnsons Roman "Jahrestage"*, 300-odd pages cataloguing and characterizing - with

now-encompassed by *Jahrestage* and its forebears.)

The first instalment of *Jahrestage* sub-titled "Aus dem Leben von Gesine Cresspahl", appeared in 1970 (reviewed in the TLS, April 23, 1971). Two further volumes were expected, but *Jahrestage* 3 (1973) gave the lie to its immediate predecessor by repeating the announcement that there was to be one more "and final part". The ten-year silence which followed fuelled doubts about *Jahrestage* that had arisen almost at the outset, even among the author's admirers. Would it ever be completed? Could it be? *Jahrestage* 4 effectively confirms these doubts. A sequel is not said to be in the offing; the work is now in a sense complete; and yet there appears to be no compelling reason why we should not at some stage learn still more about the life and times of Gesine Cresspahl. True, by

page 1891, the end of the present volume, most of her German friends, relatives and known acquaintances have died, as has her prospective husband, "D.E.", or so it seems. But the chronological entries into which the whole is divided, the "days of the year" that give all the jottings and recollections some semblance of structure, cease on August 20, 1968; Gesine was still only 35; and although she was due in Prague the following day and may therefore have come to a sticky end, it is just as possible that she didn't.

The entries start on August 20, 1967. (Johnson began writing the following January, in New York, and finished this April, in Sheerness.) As the days roll by we delve on the one hand into Gesine's "fictional" past and present, and on the other, constantly and concurrently, into the wretchedness of what in 1967-8 was the news of the moment. Those with a similar background to Gesine's - a carpenter's only child, born and bred in a small Baltic town in Hitler's Germany, in the part that became Ulbricht's, and now settled in New York - will clearly be best able to judge the accuracy of her impressions, the authenticity both of the experiences she herself underwent (at home and at school; before, during and after the war; as a student; as a single parent and refugee) and of the fates which befell her contemporaries and elders. To all readers who persevere, however, this tenuous account of part-imagined lifetimes will at least have not merely the ring of truth, however harsh, but a remarkable power to excite and revive attention, to move, perhaps even to shock.

Some of the cast of hundreds are rogues or villains, most are victims - men, women, children galore, gravely damaged if not destroyed by powers beyond their control, in the Third Reich, in East Germany, in the Midlands, in Harlem. Little by little, if only for the benefit of her child, Marie, born in 1957 - and primarily in reply to

the Cresspahl's sombre history, concentrating on what happened, and why, from the 1920s until 1961, when mother and daughter reached the United States, Marie is naturally more at ease with what has taken place since then, and whatever curiosity or concern she may feel about such recent times tends therefore to be less personal - not impartial but less family-orientated, broader. The death of Robert Kennedy, for instance, fills her with dismay. Gesine meanwhile, having worked for some years in first one bank then another, has been selected by her current employer to go to Czechoslovakia, to help arrange a dollar loan to the government of the day. And meanwhile Marie has become an enthusiastic New Yorker. Johnson's ideal readers must know, *inter alia*, their way about town.

The massive material in which the

shards of Gesine's past are embedded is by contrast so heterogeneous and so arbitrarily presented as to bemuse. That's life? Well, it's certainly a large part of life as reflected in the media, in particular in the *New York Times* from the one August to the next, and very instructive it all is, too. No newspaper can ever have played a greater part, been so extensively quoted and assessed, in a single work of literature; and if you know where to look, you can brush up on many of the public worries and calamities that preoccupied people in the 1960s and still won't go away entirely. A selection from the range - of themes, leading figures, dire realities - illustrates what persists and what has faded: international aggression, political mendacity, racial prejudice, criminal violence, Dubček, Dutschke, Che Guevara, LBJ, Martin Luther King, Heinrich Lübke, Axel Springer, F. J. Strauss, the Berlin wall, what happened in the Gulf of Tonkin, the Kiesinger/Brandt coalition.

Clearly therefore, despite its lighter moments, its superb (and for the most part defensible) waspishness, its grand, ingenious design, and the linguistic subtlety, versatility, and inventiveness which are among Johnson's hallmarks - despite all this and more besides, there is no likelihood that *Jahrestage* will wear well. It is a highly allusive work, addressed much of the time to insiders; and while, for instance, today's readers may appreciate dig at John Steinbeck or Norman Mailer and applaud the broadside discharged at Hans Magnus Enzensberger, there can hardly be no one person, far less a group, to whom all the names and the nudges and the invisible ink will yield their meaning. The *explicatures de texte* are in for a field-day, even despite Michaelis, if the text truly survives. It is much respected and little read, embalmed in academic libraries as a remarkable relic, no one should be surprised. And yet: where else has, for example, the immediate post-war scene in a small Russian-occupied community been so sharply evoked? Where in fact, take or leave the vivid vignettes, the intriguing excursions, the polyglot chat, is there anything to compare with this panoramic montage of reported and invented days not long gone by?

Where Johnson can go from here is any reader's guess, and if he takes another rest on his laurels, it will again be well deserved. But let's hope now for shorter silences than of late, at least some of them culminating in more art with less matter. Two memorable interruptions since *Jahrestage* 3 - an obliquely mournful tribute to Ingeborg Bachmann (*Eine Reise nach Klagenfurt*, 1974) and, to commemorate Max Frisch's seventieth birthday, a harrowing tale of love, exile and martial betrayal, *Skizze eines Verunglückten* (1981) - have already shown that in Johnson's case, too, power is not necessarily a function of size.

## Playing with the parrot

Patrick McCarthy

JEAN ECHENOZ

Cherokee  
248pp. Paris: Minuit. 59fr.  
2 7073 0653 3

*Cherokee* is a detective story of sorts. It is populated by criminals who double as private investigators and policemen who hunt down criminals in order to discuss with them the best way to grow artichokes. Jean Echenoz has brilliantly exploited simple but little-recognized truths about detective-writing. First, that the reader could not care less who really committed the crime. The interest of the story does not lie in the tediously coherent ending which pulls together the threads of the plot and explains away the intriguing unknowns that lurk in our memory. They retain their fascination only as fragments of the original mystery exposed in the opening pages. Echenoz's method is to offer several succinct puzzles: the theft of a rare parrot, a lunatic sect that worships the "Sister-in-law", and a fortune bequeathed to heirs who have died out.

Each tale splinters off from the others and allows Echenoz to spin fresh stories about the parrot's early life in equatorial Africa or its sojourn in a Belgian convent. Do all the puzzles fit together? Probably not, but they allow their author to offer us fragments of fiction. Another simple truth about detective-writing is that the reader does not care about morality. Heroic policemen defending society are, like romantic outlaws who avenge themselves upon it, merely a device to block the free flow of fiction. At the end of this book the hero and villain, if that is what they are, set off in their blue Rover to search for new mishaps.

Cars are important in *Cherokee* and so is the Paris underground. Echenoz lists the stops - Bastille, République and the like - because his zany tales have a very precise geography. Most of them take place in the unfashionable eastern part of Paris: the eleventh and nineteenth *arrondissements* and the working-class suburb of Ivry. Details about specific buildings mesh with American names because the characters spend their time listening to jazz and watching Hollywood films. Thus the heroine is said to look like Angie Dickinson in *Point Blank* (How many Anglo-Saxon novelists went to see *Point Blank*?)

## Affairs of the head

Deborah Boreham

REZVANI

La Loi humaine  
293 pp. Paris: Seuil. 69fr.  
2 02 006544 4

The problem for contemporary novelists is this: how to revitalize narrative in the wake of a succession of brilliant iconoclasts? Rezvani's solution is no more convincing than anyone else's, but his failures are none the less instructive. Intelligent, sensitive and above all conscious of "tradition", the author of *La Loi humaine* is what English reviewers tend to refer to as a "literary" novelist.

So keen is he to establish his kinship with the monuments of the past (and to suggest a very chic, psycho-political reading of literary history) that in a remarkable confusion of timidity and boldness, he sets his persistent occupation, thus providing himself with a store of handy symbols. Collaboration is the theme, transposed for the most part into sexual or cultural modes. Lucien, de B., returns to his provincial home after an absence of forty years, inspiring reminiscences in everyone he meets; the story of Lucien's attachment to the significantly named Franz is revealed through the standard *nouveau roman*'s device of serialized shifting viewpoints. Rezvani demonstrates a certain facility, though we might feel justified in suspecting the

The heroine is called Jenny Welman because she is nothing more than the male dream of women. The other characters, who are equally slight, are depicted from the outside - the conversations, which are conducted in Coluche's French, their clothes and their drinking-habits. Not only has Echenoz discarded the psychological motivation of the traditional detective story but he adopts towards his characters a stance which one might describe as a caricature of behaviourism. They eat or talk and he writes it down, without expecting it to mean sense. Pieces of inner life are tossed to us, as when Echenoz hints that the hero and the villain, who are cousins, are bound together by a childhood rivalry. But this is no more than a pretence of profundity inserted to remind us that people are supposed to have personalities, even if it *Cherokee* they do not.

From these incoherencies comes the comedy which is Echenoz's special quality. There is nothing very original about parrots who speak Latin or sects that talk of love and practise human sacrifice, but such light, fantastic humour penetrates the book. All people, Echenoz feels, are slightly mad and one might as well enjoy their follies; satire and black comedy are too heavy for girls like Jenny Welman, but one may laugh not so much at them as with them.

It would be wrong, however, to conclude that *Cherokee* is not a "serious" novel. Rarely has the difficult craft of story-telling been as well mastered as here. One might speculate that two decades of the New Novel have taught French writers how to pull apart dialogue, characters and plot. By the 1970s, experimentation had grown introverted and pedantic but recently novelists have realized that the high degree of self-awareness acquired during these twenty years could be employed to revitalize moribund genres like the detective story. In bringing back the furniture that the New Novel had thrown out of the window, younger French writers are not reverting to traditional values but are rather rewriting it, juxtaposing stock characters and unusual points of view or well-worn plots with sudden interruptions. They are able to reintroduce fantasy or realism while at the same time undercutting them, which explains the playful tone of *Cherokee*. Echenoz has written a book that is both "serious" and "fun" and he has also drawn closer to the contemporary French climate.

FICTION

## In a closed system

Paul Keegan

GEORGE KONRAD

The Loser  
Translated by Ivan Sanders  
215pp. Allen Lane. £8.95.  
0 7139 1599 4

In 1953 Czeslaw Milosz published *The Captive Mind*, his classic study of "how the human mind functions in the political democracies", specifically in Poland. Intended as a primer, his analysis of enforced orthodoxy is acute and resourceful - as if the more like a fiction it all feels, the more assured his grasp of the material.

Though originally published in 1980 and set in Hungary, George Konrad's novel *The Loser* covers the same essential historical ground as Milosz and does so in the same theme: that of the individual and the state under a totalitarianism. Milosz confessed to finding this relationship infinitely strange, and cast a Swiftian gaze over it. The nameless hero of Konrad's tale describes it with a cynical documentary precision and offers a normative view of the matter. But these two psychologies of everyday life in a closed society complement each other.

From the detached, treacherous perspective of an insane asylum the novel *The Loser* reviews his past life: a bourgeois Jewish childhood followed by a dizzying succession of roles as communist activist in the 1930s, soldier on the Russian front, propagandist for Soviet takeover in 1945, government official, victim of the purges, minister in the 1956 uprising, rehabilitated academic and, finally, inmate. In a sequence of five expressionistic and wistful tableaux he explores the nature of his various contracts with reality.

The most corroding of these is the last, that of Stalinist intellectual. Milosz characterized the behaviour of the individual under Stalin as historicist out of fear citizens become actors, and the zealot is in this case a man in the street. Reflecting on

this universal masquerade Konrad's hero comments: "It then seemed that the essence of man was his words; whoever said good things was a good man." What he in fact learns in speaking well is the Machiavellian or Brechtian lesson of how not to be good in a situation where goodness is impossible, or at least intolerably naive.

His tormented opportunism proceeds clearly enough from this early defeat, if not from the horrors of war which Konrad graphically orchestrates in the novel's second section. However, neither Milosz's version of the workings of *virtu* in a Stalinist order, nor the more familiar versions of self-betrayal as a disappointed ethical passion can account for this hero's vision. The novel's most singular feature is its excess - an imaginative surplus which issues in exuberant digressions on cruelty or sexual obsession: In Konrad's world complicity and taint extend to all human relations, yet the experience of degradation is not submissive so much as orgasmic. This extends to the prodigious variety of Ivan Sanders's translation, more an amalgam of voices than a narrative. But perhaps this is only another way of saying that, in Pasternak's phrase, the novel is written "at misery's full tilt".

The truism that totalitarian regimes depend on mass support underlies the doomed mutuality of all relations in *The Loser*, from the betrayals of the marriage bed to the forlorn intimacies of the torture chamber. One interrogator likes to pretend that he is beating the hero - while the latter screams obligingly, the former sits "in an armchair with his eyes closed, smiling, his hand moving rhythmically in his pocket".

Genet was perhaps the first Western writer to posit an ideal interlocking of personal fantasy and political fear. In *The Loser*, Konrad serves to re-examine the theatricality of terror, helplessly like the state, sexual fantasy as a closed system. As Dani, the hero's paranoid brother and alter ego, says of his nymphomaniac wife: "Now I see Toril and the system as one, and I am fed up with the hysterics of dictators." Her defence of her promiscuity - "I exist

only as long as I humiliate you" is the starkest truth.

Replaying the scenes of their misery, Konrad's characters atone for their complicity, gratuitously tormenting themselves and each other. Dani specializes in being beaten: "I want to watch the drama in a man's face just before he decides to hit; I am interested in degradation"; the hero's wife scorches the soles of her feet with cigarettes and grasps live wires; the hero himself defines his whole career as a filtration with imprisonment.

Moreover, the cessation of terror leaves in its wake a fearful void. Hooked on fear, Budapest society suffers collective withdrawal symptoms in the post-Stalinist thaw. Historically, hard dictatorships give way to "soft" dictatorships, and boredom replaces terror as an instrument of state control. Indeed, both are mediated by repetition, and in *The Loser* even monotony is part of that game in which the state and the individual are not adversaries but partners. Thus, after 1956 the hero rejects the chance of emigrating to the West: "Under milder pressures a deep-sea fish suffers from inner tensions".

Impossible to leave, impossible to stay and be an outsider ("Insiders, outsiders, we are all in the same boat") and impossible to accept any longer the gossipy logorrhea "hive" of Budapest; the hero chooses silence - for which he is consigned to the ambiguous utopia of an asylum.

His silence is merely the last contract of all, for Konrad's novel does not allow of individual moral choices. It concentrates instead on the drama of needs in a world bereft of choices. That the former are not to be reasoned compels us to credit even the most cruel, the most cavalier of the hero's insights - namely that in some crucial sense the state is dreamt up by its citizens as a means of expressing the vulgar, languages of human self-interest. These Konrad has dramatized with an authority which makes his country one that we all at some point inhabit, and the shock of recognition is as salutary for our understanding of the Other Europe as is the alien metaphysics spelt out by Milosz in 1953.

## Purely corrupt

Robin Buss

GEORGES BATAILLE

L'Abbé C.  
Translated by Philip A. Facey  
158pp. Marion Boyars. £7.95.  
0 7145 2709 2

If one can dissociate the voyeuristic and scatological themes in Bataille's writing from the conventions to which they usually belong, and see them instead in relation to his philosophical concerns, especially his atheism, his work takes on a tragic dimension: all the more compelling for the novelty of the form in which it is cast. And the form is crucial: this novel, first published in 1950, anticipates many current views on the nature of narrative fiction (though Bataille was not, of course, the first writer to challenge accepted formulae or to test the limitations of the novel). *L'Abbé C.* is a characteristic work by an important, if somewhat eccentric figure in contemporary French literature.

The most obvious of the narrative conventions it adopts and subverts is that of the first-person narrator, who is offered to us here as "editor" of a text which, also told in the first person, might be thought to gain plausibility by being presented within a "framework". In fact, as Bataille realizes, multiplying the number of "editors" and first-person narratives emphasizes the artificiality of the proceedings while at the same time achieving a dizzying effect, to suggest not a greater degree of realism, but the impossibility of ever touching reality by means of language.

In *L'Abbé C.* we have not only the conventional editor prefacing a manuscript account by Charles C. which comprises the main body of the novel, but also, within the manuscript, extensive "notes" by Robert C. involving as well extracts from the diary of Chianine (a typical Bataille name), all told in the first person singular. Texts and "authors" merge, abolishing the fiction of contradictory points of view or persons. Even the

fragmentary appearance of parts of the text is, as Bataille implies, a deliberate embellishment: "un livre n'est beau qu'habilement paré de l'indifférence des ruines". Far from enticing the reader into the text, the first person narrative and the other devices used by the writer assert its independence and the reader's active role in decoding it.

The twins Charles and Robert, the main protagonists of *L'Abbé C.*, are given to us at the start as a neatly-defined pair of opposites: Charles the libertine, Robert, the pious *abbé* of the title. But it is not long before we suspect that Robert's piety is to become the source of his corruption, just as the relationship between Charles and Epomine has a purity which gives their encounters an almost religious and ritualistic colour. Perhaps, after all, it is Charles who is the *abbé*.

The tragedy is that of both Robert and Charles, and their inability to evade the questions posed by the definition of their characters which is the novel's premise. But when, as first-person narrators, they intervene to comment on the events they are describing, the despair they express is that of having nothing other than language to convey experience. The cadences of Bataille's writing emphasize certain words and suggest great care and concentration in the effort to reveal "experience intérieure". He cannot be easy to translate, and should certainly not be translated in a spirit of hit or miss, as if the general lines of the story were all that mattered. This, unfortunately, is the impression given by Philip Facey's translation. Not only is the texture of the original lost, but there are some mistranslations which would disgrace a candidate at "A" level: the last four words in the sentence quoted earlier are rendered as "the indifference of the ruins" (what ruins?), and a misreading of *qui for que* makes a slaphdash disguise the grass and wild flowers, though one might expect even a casual reader of Bataille to guess that it was the other way round. Little enough modern French literature is available in English translation; it deserves better than this.

Renault whose starter motor is defective, with the result that his only chance of starting the car is if he can manage to park it pointing downhill. The family man who narrates "Blue Man" meets "the Unfortunate" in the figure of the musician who plays the saw; but the theme is prefigured in that moment when he dares "to joke about the [life] insurance, this strange contract with the future against its own uncertainty". The collision of large ideas and modest circumstances is felt in the linguistic specificity of Muschg's prose: time and again (even in the English translation) we feel the interplay of Swiss dialect and the grandiose medium of High German.

## Borrowed lives

Jayne Pilling

REMI TROYAT

The Children  
Translated by Anthea Bell  
215pp. Alden Ellis. £7.95.  
0 002 121 2

Each of *The Children* recalls elements of Remi Troyat's two previous novels, *Tom Styke*, a simple and not particularly interesting account of a young girl, and *Head in the Clouds*, a more convincing familiarity with the world of children, sharpened by a keen observation of the shaping of character. *Head in the Clouds* explored the way established habits and the sense of identity derived from childhood are transformed in late middle age, given a new feeling for life by contact with youth. The shadows of the past, however, resurface in "rather weak" autobiographies, a kind of *quintessence* which *The Children* avoids through a more disciplined approach.

The children of the title are introduced through Pierre, the book's main protagonist. At fifty-three, he is a widower who lives not so much in the shadow of bereavement as in one of a kind of parallel to his former life, a kind of country house he has bought with his wife. A solitary, yet not a lonely man, Pierre's life is made up of a series of small, unimportant events, which are provided by the efficient services of his Portuguese maid, Maria. Well trained to do everything, she is a perfect housewife as it does from the housewife's point of view. The novel is almost refreshingly vulgar in its unhesitant pragmatism; in a sense, it might be described as a "well-made book". But stock characters and events are what they always were, and the plethora of symbols and metaphors the clichés cannot hide for long.

portrait of a lonely, introverted man finding new interest in these lively children as they impinge on his attention - quick-witted Marie, eager to grow and learn, and Frédéric, rather slower, yet engaging for his dependent affections. But Troyat also suggests the genesis of an obsession: a parental image "borrowed" from a nine-year-old photograph, casually discovered, of his wife holding the newborn Frédéric.

As Pierre's cultivation and enjoyment of the children progress, so does a sense of familial exclusiveness. He discards his mistress - the sexual services she furnished no longer appropriate to his new role; more brutally, he takes the children into his own home. As Miguel slides into despairing drunkenness, and into a caricature of the foreign, inarticulate and lumpy handyman, Pierre insensitively and self-justifiably seeks grounds for adoption. The nightmare twist in the tail brings both moral retribution, and cruel exposure of the motives behind his "philanthropic" actions.

The original French text was taken from the novel's epigraph, from Dante: "You will learn how bitter is the bread of strangers, and how hard it is to mount and descend the stairway of another", which can be applied to the children and, indirectly, to Pierre, a man in exile from life. But the fact that it cuts both ways is one of the main problems of the book. The undeniably effective psychologizing robs the tale of its sting: the very discretion of Pierre's human equation leaves one cold. One feels a little too often - on Pierre's self-deceiving callousness to Miguel, for example, or his "unhealthy" susceptibility to Maria's "motherly" More satisfying in its suggestion of emotional authenticity, or the lack of it.

Martin Swales

ADOLF MUSCHG

The Blue Man and other stories  
Translated by Marlis Zeller Cambron  
and Michael Hamburger  
150pp. Manchester: Carcanet. £6.95.  
0 83635 401 4

In the six short stories that make up this volume Adolf Muschg traces the contours of six blighted existences. A hill farmer writes a letter from prison and explains how it came about that he committed incest with his daughters. A prosperous accountant finds himself compulsively giving away a large sum of money to a musician who plays the musical saw. A crematorium attendant steals gold rings from the corpses entrusted to his care. A farmer forestalls his decline into death by blowing himself and his property to pieces. A grandfather tells the story of his visit to a brothel, but his account is greeted with scientific prudence - and incomprehension - on the part of his grandchildren. A prosperous man has an aimless, doomed relationship with a girl of student age.

Given the gloom that informs so much of Muschg's work seems at first sight unremarkable. Brooding, alienation, *anomie* constitute the staple diet and guarantee authenticity. Yet the overall effect of Muschg's prose is curiously at variance with his emotional blight that is its principal theme. There is a refreshing modesty to the grand existential issues at stake. The grand existential issues are indeed present (as Marlis Zeller indeed points out in her introduction). But what makes Muschg's prose remarkable (and, on occasion, marvellously funny) is the collision between a grandiloquent

existential deprivation and the particular - social, psychological, and linguistic - foreground through which the stylizing experiences are filtered. In "The Scythe Hand" the narrator tries to explain in morally and linguistically acceptable terms the lonely life on a Swiss mountain pasture that accounts for his complicated incestuous entanglements. When tragedy strikes, it does so in a chain of disasters that are listed with pedantic conscientiousness.

Similarly, the narrator in "What Else?" may be concerned to record the emotional abyss that threatens to swallow him up, but he spends much of the story preoccupied with an aged

Renault whose starter motor is defective, with the result that his only chance of starting the car is if he can manage to park it pointing downhill. The family man who narrates "Blue Man" meets "the Unfortunate" in the figure of the musician who plays the saw; but the theme is prefigured in that moment when he dares "to joke about the [life] insurance, this strange contract with the future against its own uncertainty". The collision of large ideas and modest circumstances is felt in the linguistic specificity of Muschg's prose: time and again (even in the English translation) we feel the interplay of Swiss dialect and the grandiose medium of High German.

## Types and type-casting

William Larrett

PETER HÄRTLING

Das Windrad  
224pp. Darmstadt und New York: Luchterhand.

George Landerer, the central character in Peter Härtling's latest novel, *Das Windrad*, decides in his mid-fifties to give up his printing business in order to follow the *ennui* in which he feels trapped. Uncertain of his ultimate goal, he first goes to the Swabian village of Endingen, where the family has spent many holidays. Here he meets up with a group of friends, some old, some new, who, as his mentors, provide him with the right stimulus, love and influence to make his "flight" successful. Of these the two most significant are Baldur Kannabich, a sculptor and inventor, and Pocco, a nine-year-old autistic boy.

The main action is provided by

Kannabich's plan to build a windmill to generate electricity despite local government opposition. The wheel is erected attracting supporters and sightseers from all over Germany, but is pulled down by the police after the inevitable confrontation between them and the protesters. This leads, though it is not the least reason, to Kannabich's suicide and to Landerer finding himself expected to carry on Kannabich's work.

This novel is more than just another contribution to the environmentalist peace movement debate, however. If Kannabich provides a blend of public, political and personal contexts, the child, Pocco, provides an intensely personal and intimate concern, yet both areas are enmeshed and embedded in language, a theme which, improbably pervades the novel, gaining in significance as the relationship with Pocco, the boy without language, becomes dominant.

Landerer, a type-setter by trade, becomes increasingly aware of the relationship between form and sense

and form and meaning, searching for new contents for old forms, including old type-faces, as a means of preserving them and protesting their individuality against an inviolable, deadening uniformity. As Pocco learns to speak, Landerer learns to "read" more precisely a variety of signs and to differentiate more clearly the scale of nuances in motive and inflection in verbal and non-verbal utterances, acquiring a subtlety which is itself embodied in Härtling's narrative web and his finely shaded use and exploitation of the forms of German reported speech. He handles dialogue beautifully, compelling his reader to read actively, often to supply from the present to the recalled past.

*Das Windrad* is surely a delicate, child's narrative voice, sometimes colloquial, sometimes lyrical, explores the symbols and signs of speech and behaviour, of political involvement and art.

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